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Prayers at any spot not religious right, says HC
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India eyes buying Russian oil as Hormuz chokes supply
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SPORTS
India clinch 7-run victory in nail-biter vs Eng, enter final
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SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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After 6 days, India condoles Khamenei's death

This comes after Tehran fumes over US sinking Iranian ship which was 'Indian Navy's guest'

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

After six days, India on Thursday finally condoled the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei amid mounting criticism of the government by for its silence on the assassination as well as on sinking of an Iranian ship by the US off the Sri Lankan coast.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri visited the Iranian embassy and signed the condolence book, while External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar spoke to Araghchi for the second time since the February 28 attacks.

This came after tension in West Asia peaked with Iran accused the US of sinking its frigate IRIS Dena, describing it a "guest of the Indian Navy", in international waters off Sri Lanka, killing at least 130 sailors.

The Indian Navy said it joined search and rescue operations after receiving a distress alert from the vessel, which had participated in the MILAN Naval Exercise hosted by India in February.

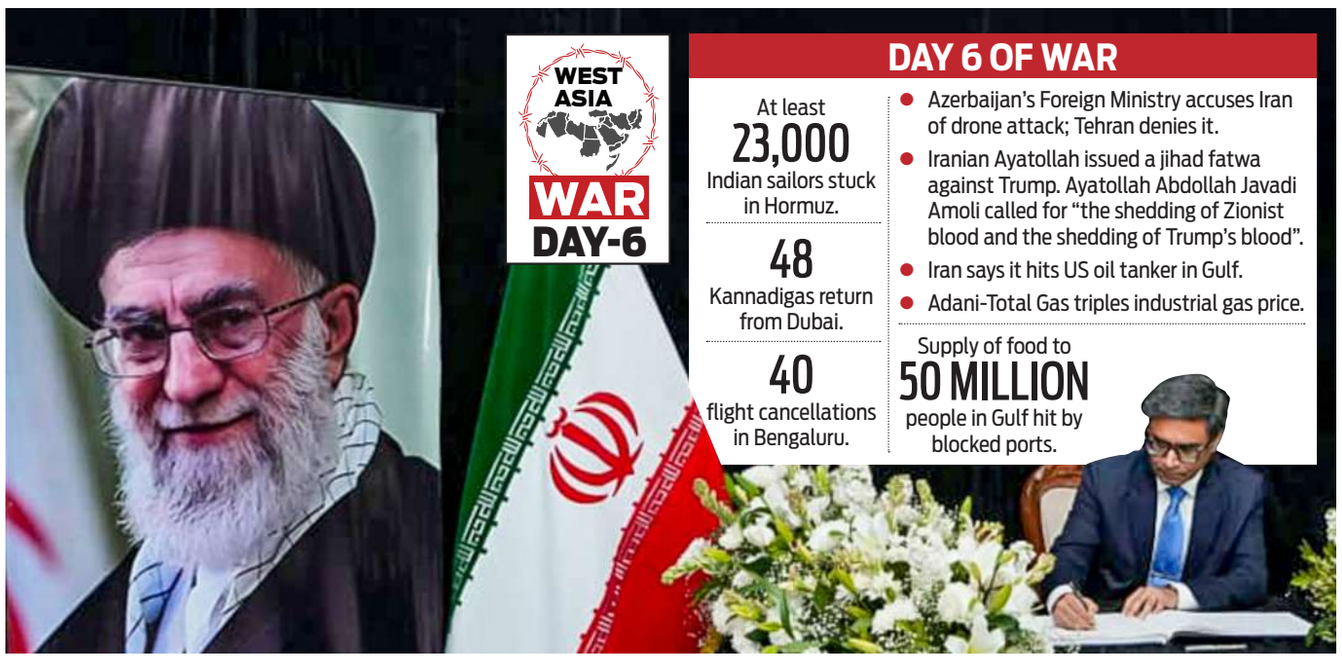
Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi called the strike an "atrocity at sea", alleging the warship was hit without warning while returning home.

According to the Indian Navy, a distress call from the frigate was received at the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre Colombo in the early hours of Wednesday. A long-range maritime patrol aircraft was deployed at 10am to assist rescue efforts, while another aircraft with air-droppable life rafts was kept on standby.

Naval ship INS Tarangini was also diverted to the area and reached the search zone by 4pm. By then, rescue operations had already begun by the Sri Lanka Navy.

The Iranian frigate was operating about 20 nautical miles west of Galle in waters under Sri Lanka's responsibility when the distress signal was issued.The vessel had earlier taken part in the International Fleet Review 2026 in Visakhapatnam and was returning to Iran after participating in the Milan exercise.

Iran's ambassador to India, Mohammad Fathali, said Tehran did not want war but warned that the duration of the conflict would depend on Iran.


WEST ASIA
WAR
DAY-6
DAY 6 OF WAR
At least 23,000 Indian sailors stuck in Hormuz.
48 Kannadigas return from Dubai.
40 flight cancellations in Bengaluru.
Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry accuses Iran of drone attack; Tehran denies it.
Iranian Ayatollah issued a jihad fatwa against Trump. Ayatollah Abdollah Javadi Amoli called for "the shedding of Zionist blood and the shedding of Trump's blood".
Iran says it hits US oil tanker in Gulf.
Adani-Total Gas triples industrial gas price.
Supply of food to 50 MILLION people in Gulf hit by blocked ports.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri signs the Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali's condolence book at the Embassy of Iran in New Delhi on Thursday —*PTI*

- Former Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal said the US has ignored India's sensitivities as the Iranian ship was in these waters because of India's invitation.

INDIA SEEKS US COVER FOR ENERGY CARGOES

Amid fears of disruption in energy supplies, India has approached the United States to secure marine insurance cover for ships carrying oil from the Middle East, a senior oil ministry official said.

The widening war has affected tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, through which about a fifth of global oil trade passes. India currently has crude stocks and fuel supplies sufficient for around 50 days.

INDIA REJECTS REPORT CLAIMING US USING ITS PORTS

India also rejected claims that US forces were using Indian ports to launch strikes on Iran. The Ministry of External Affairs dismissed comments made by former US Army officer Douglas Macgregor in an interview suggesting the US Navy was relying on Indian naval bases.

The ministry's fact-check unit described the claims as "fake and false." —*Salar News*

>>>*More on Pgs 3, 5, 6 & 7*

FIGHTING INTENSIFIES AS IRAN, ISRAEL-US REFUSE TO RELENT

The conflict in West Asia intensified on Thursday as Iran launched a new wave of attacks on Israel and US bases across the region.

Air raid sirens sounded in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem as Iran launched missiles.

The conflict began on Saturday when the US and Israel launched strikes that killed Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. More than 1,000 people have been killed in Iran. The war has disrupted global oil and gas supplies.

Iran said it fired its long-range Khorramshahr4 missile with a one-tonne warhead. The Revolutionary Guard also claimed attacks in Bahrain, Kuwait and the UAE. The UAE said one missile and six drones hit its territory. Falling debris wounded six people in Abu Dhabi. Qatar evacuated residents near Doha's US Embassy after a missile attack, while Saudi said it destroyed a drone near its border with Jordan.

An explosion struck a tanker off Kuwait and another vessel docked near Iraq's Khor al-Zubair port. Israeli airstrikes also hit two indoor sports halls in Tehran believed to be used by the Revolutionary Guard and Basij militia.

European powers France, Italy and Greece said they would coordinate military deployments to protect shipping in the Red Sea. —*PTI*

Modi calls for 'swift end' to West Asia conflict

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Amid global scrutiny over India's silence on the attack against Iran, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday called for a "swift end" to the escalating conflict in West Asia, saying no issue can be resolved through military confrontation.

Speaking after talks with Finnish President Alexander Stubb, Modi said the crisis in the region figured prominently in their discussions.

"India and Finland both believe in the rule of law, dialogue and diplomacy. No issue can be resolved through military conflict alone," he said. "Be it Ukraine or West Asia, we support a swift end to conflicts and every effort towards peace."

MODI SPEAKS TO MACRON

Modi spoke to French President Emmanuel Macron and discussed the West Asia war and the need for a return to dialogue. Modi & Macron said they will continue to coordinate efforts for the early restoration of peace.— PTI

Bose out as Bengal Guv, TN's RN Ravi in

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose resigned from his post on Thursday evening, triggering a fresh political storm in the state. This comes just days before the schedule for the crucial assembly elections is expected to be announced. He was replaced by Tamil Governor RN Ravi.Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee alleged possible political pressure from Union Home Minister Amit Shah. Meanwhile, Kavinder Gupta too resigned as the Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh, just about nine months after assuming office.—*PTI*

>>>*More on Page 3*

India, Finland to expand ties in defence, AI, 6G

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday held bilateral talks with Finnish President Alexander Stubb at Hyderabad House in New Delhi, with both sides agreeing to expand cooperation in digitalisation, sustainability, clean energy, quantum computing and semiconductors, while deepening engagement in defence and space. The leaders also discussed expanding cooperation in Arctic and polar research. Modi said India will co-host the World Circular Economy Forum with Finland this year to boost sustainability initiatives. Modi said India and Finland are elevating their relationship to a strategic partnership. —*PTI*

>>>*More on Page 3*

CM to present record 17th State Budget

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

The Budget Session of the Karnataka Legislature will begin in the City on Friday. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who recently became Karnataka's longest serving CM, will present the Budget for 2026-27, his record 17th as the State's Finance Minister.

As the CM is expected to look for resource mobilisation measures, speculations are rife that there may be an increase in taxes.

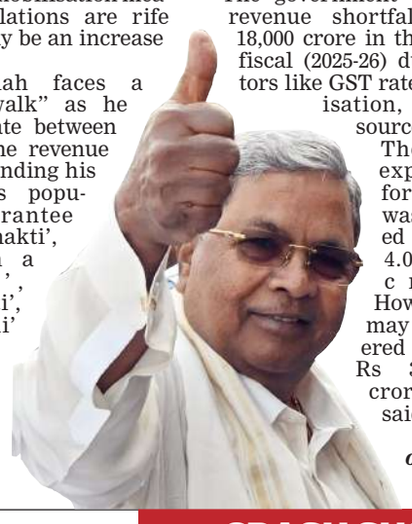
Siddaramaiah faces a "tightrope walk" as he must negotiate between containing the revenue deficit and funding his government's populist guarantee schemes ('Shakti', 'Gruha Lakshmi', 'Gruha Jyoti', 'Yuva Nidhi' and 'Anna Bhagya'), sources said.

There are calls to trim the outlay on the guarantee schemes, with annual spending for the five schemes exceeding Rs 50,000 crore. In 2025-26, the government allocated Rs 51,034 crore for the guarantee schemes.

Also to be factored in is an increase in the government's expenses like salaries, as it has decided to recruit for 56,432 vacant jobs.

The government expects a revenue shortfall of Rs 18,000 crore in the current fiscal (2025-26) due to factors like GST rate rationalisation, official sources said.

The total expenditure for 2025-26 was estimated to be Rs 4.09 lakh crore. However this may be lowered to about Rs 3.9 lakh crore, they said. —*PTI*



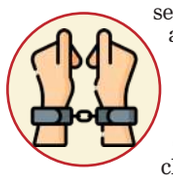
>>>*More on Page 2*

7 Nashik class 10 students booked for sexually abusing juniors

NASHIK, 5 MARCH

Seven class 10 students of a hostel run by the Maharashtra social welfare department in Igatpuri in Nashik have been booked for allegedly sexually abusing their juniors, an official said on Thursday.

The hostel superintendent too has been booked in the POCSO case filed at the Igatpuri police station.



"A case has been filed against seven Class X students and the hostel superintendent," collector Ayush Prasad said.

The class 10 students are accused of sedating those from classes 5 to 7, and then engaging in unnatural acts.

"It was going on since the last seven months. However, we found that the victims had informed hostel superintendent Sushant Dudhsagare, who ignored it. Therefore, he too has been named in the case," an official said.

ZP Social Welfare Department in-charge Dr Sanjay Shinde visited the spot and submitted a report to the ZP CEO.

The seven students have been sent to a remand home. —*PTI*

Nitish, Pawar to win RS polls unopposed

Bihar CM Nitish Kumar and BJP's Nitin Nabin are set to enter the Rajya Sabha unopposed, while veteran leader Sharad Pawar will return to the House. They were among 40 candidates who filed papers for 37 seats falling vacant across 10 states, with one seat each in Bihar, Odisha and Haryana. Seven seats are due in Maharashtra, six in TN, five in Bihar and Bengal, four in Odisha, three in Assam, two in Haryana, Telangana and Chhattisgarh, and one in Himachal. —*PTI*

>>>*More on Page 3*

CRASH SUSPECTED

Su-30 MKI fighter jet goes missing after takeoff from Assam

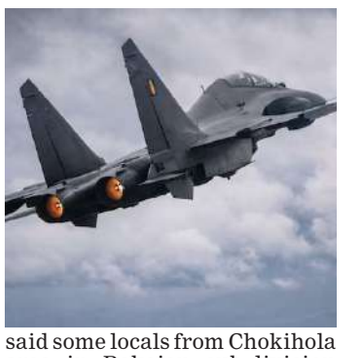
GUWAHATI/DIPHU, 5 MARCH

A Sukhoi-30 fighter aircraft of the Indian Air Force went missing from radar contact while flying over Assam's Karbi Anglong district on Thursday evening, officials said.

"An IAF Su-30 MKI is reported overdue. The aircraft had taken off from Jorhat air base in Assam and was last in contact at 7.42pm," Defence PRO Lt Col Mahender Rawat said in a statement.

He said search and rescue operations have been initiated to ascertain the status of the fighter jet.

There is no immediate news of the pilot yet, the PRO said.



Meanwhile, another official said some locals from Chokihola area in Bokajan sub-division have claimed that a plane may have crashed inside a forested area.

"We are preparing a team to send and verify it. We cannot confirm anything at this moment," he added.

The Russian-built Su-30s were delivered first in 1997. Currently, they are being produced by the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited. More than 250 aircraft are currently with the IAF.

The Su-30 MKI is a multirole air superiority fighter widely deployed by the Indian Air Force, capable of performing a range of operations from deep strike missions to air defence. Any incident involving such an advanced fighter aircraft is taken very seriously by the defence establishment, with stringent protocols followed to ensure the safety of the crew and to ascertain the cause of the aircraft's disappearance. —*Salar News*

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Expect more taxes & more borrowings this Budget: Ashoka

Slams financial mismanagement, says debt will exceed Rs 6 lakh crore

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

Leader of Opposition in the Assembly **R Ashoka** on Thursday said government is expected to borrow Rs 1.15 lakh crore and is likely to impose fresh taxes on the people during the State budget which will be present on 6 March.

He said the Budget would have nothing new, adding that its highlights would be criticism of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and repeated mentions of the five guarantee schemes ('Shakti', 'Gruha Lakshmi', 'Gruha Jyoti, 'Yuva Nidhi' and 'Anna Bhagya').

"While Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman reduced the tax burden in the Union Budget, Siddaramaiah is known for imposing taxes on people. He imposes about four taxes a month and has already introduced 36 taxes, and is now looking for ways to impose more," Ashoka said. "By the end of the Chief Minister's term, the State's total debt will probably exceed Rs 6 lakh crore."

Claiming that Siddaramaiah's borrowing equal those of 12 or 13 former chief ministers combined, Ashoka said that Basavaraj Bommai who was CM before the Congress came to power, presented a "surplus budget," without excessive borrowings.

Members of the Wine Merchants Association urge the State govt to abandon the process of issuing certificates and requested for a minimum 20 per cent profit margin on retail liquor sales; (inset) They submitted a memorandum to Excise Minister RB Timmapur, at Freedom Park, on Thursday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

He also dismissed the CM's claim that the government had achieved 90 per cent of the promises made in the previous Budget. "The fact is that not even 9 per cent has been achieved. I have evidence for it," he said.

Ashoka further alleged that the government had also failed in tax collection, achieving only 48 per cent of the target, and had released less than 40 per cent of the allocated funds to some departments.

Notably, as per the 2025-26 Budget Estimates, the State's total liabilities by the end of March 2026 are projected at Rs 7,64,655 crore, which constitutes 24.91 per cent of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), the government has said.

BIG BUDGET

Bengaluru is likely to get a significant portion of the Budget's allocation – primarily for its infrastructural woes. The government has also been prioritising several projects – including the tunnel road project, Namma Metro expansion and the Bengaluru Business Corridor.

With water shortages likely and the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) polls scheduled for later in the summer, the Congress may look to allocate more for the City.

Shivakumar has also been vocal about irrigation projects, including the Yettinahole Integrated Drinking Water Supply, Cauvery Phase 6 dam, and the Upper Krishna Project Phase 3 project and the Tungabhadra Dam. Several of these projects would likely be framed as development to the Kalyan Karnataka region.

The government may also hike its excise revenue target from Rs 40,000 crore.

BILLS

Several Bills, including an amendment to the Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Act, 2020, aimed at allowing vehicles used for illegal transport of cattle to be released on an indemnity bond, and the Karnataka Crowd Control (Managing Crowd at Events and Place of Gathering) Bill, 2025, which was referred to a select committee, are likely to be tabled during the Budget session between 6 March and 27 March. —*Agencies*

AMID SC RULING

Cabinet to decide on internal reservation in govt jobs: HM

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

Home Minister G Parameshwara has said that the State Cabinet is likely to discuss the issue of providing internal reservation while filling vacancies in the government sector.

Speaking to reporters in Bengaluru, Parameshwara said, "the government has already taken a decision to provide internal reservation. There are issues with the classification, stating that one section receives priority while preparing the roster. It will be discussed again in the cabinet and decided. Since the Cabinet made the earlier decision, any amendment to it should be made in the Cabinet itself."

Asked about differences within the Cabinet on internal reservation, Parameshwara said, "There will always be differences of opinion, and all ministers will share their views in the cabinet. But the Cabinet will take a decision in the larger interest."

The State government had decided to conduct recruitment for 56,432 vacant jobs based on the reservation order in force before 28 December 2022 (15 per cent for SCs and 3 per cent for STs), due to the stay on the enhanced quota and internal reservation.

The previous BJP government had increased the reservation quota for SCs from 15 per cent to 17 per cent and for Scheduled Tribes from 3 per cent to 7 per cent, raising the State's total reservation to 56 per cent, exceeding the Supreme Court-mandated 50 per cent ceiling.

While this is still under litigation, the Congress government decided to provide internal reservation within the 17 per cent quota for SCs based on the 6:6:5 formula.

The issue has become a political flashpoint for several caste groups, while the issue of vacant government job posts has seen massive protests erupt across the State.

The Cabinet was set to meet on Thursday, but it was unclear if a decision had been made at the time of publishing. —*PTI*

Tension in Bidar after assault on teachers; 49 booked, 17 arrested

BIDAR, 5 MARCH

Tension gripped the town of Basavakalyan in Bidar district after Muslims staged a protest alleging that two teachers from their community had been assaulted.

Angered by the incident Muslims reportedly attempted to throw stones at the police personnel demanding that the suspects be arrested or handed over to them.

"Allegations surfaced that two Muslim school teachers Mohammed Arif, 25, and Syed Imran, 31, were assaulted by six to seven drunks," police said. Humanabad Sub-division DySP Madolappa told Salar News that "The accused were drunk."

"A case was registered against 49 Muslims for attempting to assault ASI Mukhtar Patel and other police officials," said DySP Madolappa.

After two private school teachers were allegedly assaulted, people laid siege to the Basavakalyan Town Police Station —*SALAR*

Police said the two teachers had gone for a walk near Yatri Nivas in Basavakalyan when they were allegedly attacked. A case was registered at the Basavakalyan Town Police Station.

Bidar SP Pradeep Gunti told Salar News, "The victims were not clerics but were private school teachers."

Five people who attacked the teacher have been arrested and sent to judicial custody, while 12 of the 49 accused in the case were arrested. Additional police have been deployed to the town. —*Salar*

Govt to report on Mysuru stadium amid land row

MYSURU, 5 MARCH

Congress MLC Yathindra Siddaramaiah on Thursday said that a committee headed by Mysuru Deputy Commissioner will be constituted to re-verify the a five-acre land provided by the State government for construction of a stadium in T Narasipura town.

The said land belongs to the Karnataka Silk Industries Corporation Limited (KSIC) and is situated in the Varuna constituency represented by CM Siddaramaiah.

The committee headed by deputy commissioner G Lakshmikanth Reddy will include senior officials of the district administration and Departments of Sericulture, Youth Empowerment and Sports.

Congress MLC Yathindra Siddaramaiah says that a committee will be formed to re-verify the KSIC land in Mysuru on Thursday —*SALAR*

The committee will submit a report on the feasibility of constructing a stadium on the land to the government, which will then take a final decision.

Yathindra clarified that the government will not close down the silk filature unit as its employers had voted CM Siddaramaiah and State Social Welfare Minister HC Mahadevappa to power.

He accused the Opposition for misleading people.

His government allowed the construction in the vacant land as it remained unutilised by Sericulture and Horticulture Departments.

Meanwhile, the protest by various organisations against of construction of the stadium entered a fortnight on Thursday. —*Salar News*

Lokayukta raids find 8 officers with Rs 35.65cr

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

The Lokayukta police on Thursday conducted searches at 42 locations across Karnataka linked to eight government officials accused of possessing disproportionate assets. they uncovered properties and valuables worth about Rs 35.65 crore, officials said.

The searches were carried out at the houses and offices of the accused officials, as well as at the residences of their relatives across different districts of Karnataka.

The searches were following complaints registered against eight officers at Lokayukta police stations in Bengaluru City, Mandya, Gadag, Mysuru, Vijayapura, and Yadgir.

The searches revealed immovable properties worth Rs 24.05 crore and movable assets valued at Rs 11.59 crore.

Among the accused, Shashidhar R, CEO of Singanayakanahalli Raita Seva Sahakara Sangha in Yelahanka taluk of Bengaluru, was found to have allegedly amassed assets worth Rs 5.15 crore.

HC Indresh, Associate Professor at the Veterinary College, Hebbal, was found to possess assets worth Rs 2.53 crore.

Vasanth Valappa Naik, Chief Engineer posted at PWD in Bengaluru, had assets worth Rs 6.40 crore.

In Mandya, Sathish S, Assistant Executive Engineer at PWD, was found to possess assets worth Rs 4.46 crore, while M K Surakod, Taluk Backward Classes Welfare Officer posted in Gadag, had Rs 2.12 crore assets. —*PTI*

BEL, Bellatrix Aerospace sign MoU for satellites

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

Navratna defence PSU Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) on Thursday said it has signed a memorandum of understanding with space tech firm Bellatrix Aerospace to collaborate on the design, development and manufacturing of satellite systems and payloads.

The partnership will combine BEL's experience in advanced electronics and mission-critical payloads with Bellatrix's expertise in satellite propulsion and subsystems. The collaboration aims to advance indigenous capabilities in satellite platforms designed for Very Low Earth Orbit (VLEO) operations. —*PTI*

MP MEETS MUFTI

On the occasion of Holi, Rajya Sabha MP Lehar Singh Siroya visited Maulana Mufti Mohammed Maqsood Imran Rashid in Bengaluru. He also met Archbishop Peter Machado —*SALAR*

It's true there are small issues in BJP: Vijayendra

MYSURU, 5 MARCH

Soon after reports of differences in the State BJP came out, party President BY Vijayendra on Thursday admitted that there was indeed some level of dissent in the BJP, but it will be resolved soon.

He said, "It is true there are small issues and confusions in the party. We will not let this continue."

This comes after former chief minister BS Yeddiyurappa, at a function in Honnalli on 28 February, announced prospective candidates for the 2028 general elections. Soon, many BJP leaders voiced their dissent, calling the announcement unfair. They said it is the BJP central parliamentary board that makes these decisions.

'TO CONTINUE UNTIL FIT'

On Thursday, the former chief minister who turned 85 recently said he will continue to fight till he is fit.

He said during his 60 years of political career he fought for the welfare of all communities, farmers, strived hard for the overall development of the state, and even today continues to protect their interest. A large number of beneficiaries have now started to reap the benefits of the Bhagyalakshmi scheme of providing incentives up to Rs 1 lakh to the girl child that he had implemented 19 years ago, he added. —*Salar News*

HAILS LINGAYAT TRADITION

Sanatana Dharma can never be erased: VP

BELAGAVI, 5 MARCH

Sanatana Dharma may be tested by time, but it can never be erased, Vice President CP Radhakrishnan said here on Thursday.

He was speaking as the chief guest at the inauguration of the Rajagopuram of the Sri Veerabhadreshwar Temple in Yaduru in this district, says a release.

Describing the occasion as a moment of spiritual resurgence and reaffirmation, the vice president said that Bharat is not merely a nation but a living civilisation, a continuous flow of consciousness from the Indus Valley to Kanyakumari.

He noted that this is the land where the eternal wisdom of the Vedas was first heard and where the profound message of the Bhagavad Gita continues to guide humanity to act with courage and live with righteousness.

Vice President at the Veerabhadreshwar Temple, Yaduru, in Belagavi on Thursday *X @CPR_VP*

Stating that Hindu consciousness is not confined to rituals but is a way of life, he highlighted the timeless philosophy of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" and India's spiritual vision that sees divinity in nature and in every human being.

Referring to the Veera-Shaiva Lingayat tradition, he underlined its contributions to spiritual, educational, cultural, and social progress in Karnataka and Maharashtra.

He said that the Veera-Shaiva mutts and temples have played a transformative role in nurturing faith.

Radhakrishnan paid tributes to Shiva Yogi Shri Kadasiddheshwar Swamiji, a prominent Lingayat leader.

He hailed the pontiffs of Shri Kadasiddheshwar Mutt for their tireless efforts to preserve daily worship, rituals, renovation works and spiritual service. —*PTI*

MAHE sets up Quantum Hub at MIT Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

The Manipal Academy of Higher Education on Thursday announced the establishment of Quantum-Hub@MAHE at the Manipal Institute of Technology here to develop an indigenous quantum hardware and open-architecture ecosystem.

The university said the hub will function as an integrated platform for quantum hardware experimentation, deep-tech startup incubation, component innovation, workforce development, testing infrastructure, and translational research.

The initiative is aimed at strengthening India's capability across the quantum value chain. "As part of this multi-campus deep-tech strategy, Manipal Institute of Technology, Bengaluru, will serve as the anchor for advanced hardware experimentation, cryogenic and RF (radio frequency) infrastructure, and structured quantum engineering education and training," MAHE said in a statement.

The facility will commence operations with a 25-qubit dilution refrigeration (DR) open-architecture system designed for advanced training and experimentation, it said. An open-architecture ecosystem refers to a system that researchers, developers, and institutions can easily use, modify, and collaborate on, instead of being restricted to a single organisation.

The initiative was formalised through MoUs with QuantrolOx (Finland), Bluefors (Finland), QBLOX (Netherlands), ConScience (Sweden) and CDAC. —*PTI*

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BOSE OUT AS WEST BENGAL GOVERNOR, TN'S RN RAVI IN

Mamata alleges 'political pressure' from Amit Shah weeks before polls

KOLKATA, 5 MARCH

West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose resigned from his post on Thursday evening, triggering a fresh political storm in the state.

This comes just days before the schedule for the crucial assembly elections is expected to be announced.

He was replaced by Tamil Governor RN Ravi.

The sudden development came while Bose was in New Delhi.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was "shocked and deeply concerned" by the sudden exit and hinted at possible political pressure from Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

She said she has learnt from Shah that RN Ravi, Tamil Nadu Governor and ex-deputy NSA, will hold additional charge of West Bengal following Bose's exit.

She added that she was not consulted.

Bose told PTI, "Yes, I have resigned. I have been the Governor of Bengal for three-and-a-half years; it's enough for me."

However, he did not disclose the reasons.

Bose, who took charge as West Bengal Governor on 17 November, 2022, stepped down nearly 20 months before the end of his tenure, making him the second consecutive Bengal governor to demit office before full term.

West Bengal BJP President Samik Bhattacharya called Banerjee's remarks "baseless." "I have heard that he has resigned on health grounds," he said.

- Tamil Nadu's 15th Governor Ravi too made headlines with his intense confrontations with the DMK government. He often clashed with the MK Stalin-led government on policies, legislation and regional sentiment. One big flashpoint was when Ravi skipped portions of the speech prepared by the government in his address to the state Assembly.

Ladakh Kavinder Gupta | CV Ananda Bose | RN Ravi

Bose's tenure turned turbulent as relations between Raj Bhavan (now Lok Bhavan) and the TMC government soured.

He frequently criticised the state's policies. In 2024, his visit to Sandeshkhali amid violence was criticised as an attempt to politicise the issue. It may be recalled that he was accused of sexual harassment by a woman employee of the Lok Bhavan, who filed a police complaint.

When Banerjee said the woman spoke to her, Bose sued her for defamation. He had also sought to shift his voting rights from Kerala to West Bengal.

The development also revived memories of the unusual exit of his predecessor Jagdeep Dhankhar, who was elected Vice President in 2022.

Tamil Nadu's 15th Governor Ravi too made headlines with his intense confrontations with the DMK government.

He often clashed with the MK Stalin-led government on policies, legislation and regional sentiment.

One big flashpoint was when Ravi skipped portions of the speech prepared by the government in his address to the state Assembly.

LADAKH LQ QUITS

Kavinder Gupta too resigned as the Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh, just about nine months after assuming office. Gupta had taken the oath of office on 18 July, 2025, becoming the third Lieutenant Governor of the Union Territory. *—Agencies*

'MODI IS COMPROMISED'

India never looked so timid: Cong warns of recession

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

The Congress on Thursday questioned the Modi government's "criminal silence" on the "trampling upon" the rules-based order by the US and Israel. It added that the impact of the West Asia conflict will be felt by India as recession will set in soon.

Congress' media and publicity department head **Pawan Khera** said Prime Minister Narendra Modi often speaks of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' and 'Atithi Devo Bhava', but there is not even a trace of these words in his foreign policy.

He alleged that Modi is "compromised" either due to the Epstein Files issue or the Adani case in the US.

"Why, after all, did Narendra Modi go to Israel a few days ago? Within 48 hours of Narendra Modi returning from Israel, the illegal war between America-Israel and Iran broke out," Khera said.

Khera attacked the government over the US submarine sinking an Iranian warship off Sri Lanka's coast.

"The shocking thing is that in this joint naval exercise, America had refused to send its ship at the last moment and had only sent its officers. Did India know that America was going to do this in the Indian Ocean? If it did, what did we do about it? And if it didn't, what steps did the Indian government take to protect its guest?" he asked.

Due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, Indian goods worth Rs 10,000 crore, 38 ships, and 1,100 sailors are stranded

-Pawan Khera, Congress media head

The US-Israel attacks reaching close to our borders and up to the Indian Ocean is a matter of concern for citizens. Centre's silence on such a serious matter is deeply worrying.

-Akhilesh Yadav, Samajwadi Party Chief

Meanwhile, Rahul Gandhi said that while the country needed a steady hand at the wheel, it has a "compromised PM who has surrendered our strategic autonomy". *—PTI*

India, Finland to expand ties in defence, AI, 6G telecoms

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Finland President Alexander Stubb and Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the inauguration of the Raisina Dialogue, in New Delhi, on Thursday *—PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday held bilateral talks with Finnish President Alexander Stubb at Hyderabad House in New Delhi, with both sides agreeing to expand cooperation in digitalisation, sustainability, clean energy, quantum computing and semiconductors, while deepening engagement in defence and space.

The leaders also discussed expanding cooperation in Arctic and polar research. Modi said India will co-host the World Circular Economy Forum with Finland this year to boost sustainability initiatives.

Modi said India and Finland are elevating their relationship to a strategic partnership focused on digitalisation and sustainability. He said the move would energise cooperation in high-technology sectors such as artificial intelligence, 6G telecom, clean energy and quantum computing.

The two leaders also agreed to strengthen collaboration in defence, space, semiconductors and critical minerals.

Highlighting economic ties, the Prime Minister said the proposed India–European Union Free Trade Agreement would deepen trade, investment and technology cooperation between New Delhi and Helsinki. He also referred to the presence of Finnish telecom major Nokia in India, noting that its mobile phones and telecom networks have connected millions of Indians. Modi also pointed to infrastructure collaboration, including the world's tallest railway bridge over the Chenab river built with Finnish architectural support, and a bamboo-to-bioethanol refinery in Numaligarh. Earlier, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met Stubb in New Delhi ahead of his address at the Raisina Dialogue.

BACKS UNSC SEAT FOR INDIA

Backing India's global role, Stubb said reforms in the multilateral system are needed to reflect today's geopolitical realities. "The world is changing… India, together with its friends in the Global South, will help determine the direction of the global order," he said, adding that a permanent seat for India in the United Nations Security Council is "of utmost importance."

'IRAN, ISRAEL-US WORKED OUTSIDE OF INT'L LAW'

President Alexander Stubb said both Iran and the Israel-US combine have worked "outside the context of international law". Stubb also said that Iran made a "strategic mistake" by attacking Gulf nations in retaliation for the Israel-US strikes, because now the Gulf states are going to rally around together to see what they can do with Iran. *—PTI*

Modi 'very focused' on delivery: Carney on Indian schemes

SYDNEY, 5 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is "very focused" on delivery of welfare programmes to the common people and has been successful in bringing "hundreds of millions" into the formal economy, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney has said.

Carney was speaking on 4 March at an interaction at the Lowy Institute, Australia's leading think tank, where he was asked to speak about his assessment of Prime Minister Modi. Carney was in India from 27 February to 2 March, during which India and Canada sealed key pacts on supplies of uranium and critical minerals & agreed to conclude a comprehensive economic partnership agreement soon. "A huge motivation for the financial reform transformations, the UPI and other things... was to get money directly to individuals without leakage...," he said.

He also highlighted India's 'non-aligned' position in global affairs. *—PTI*

There's, look, the guy's (Modi), he's unique. I would say, you know, 25 years, and he has not taken a day off, 25 years straight as either chief minister in Gujarat or prime minister, not one day off

-Mark Carney, Canada's Prime Minister

IRAN HAS NOT YET ELECTED NEW SUPREME LEADER: IRANIAN ENVOY

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Iran has not yet elected a successor to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, who was killed in a joint United States–Israel airstrike last week, a senior Iranian official said on Thursday.

Abdul Majeed Hakeemelahi, the representative of Iran's supreme leader in India, said the selection process is still underway amid reports that Khamenei's son, Mojtaba Khamenei, could succeed him.

"There are several candidates for this position, and Ayatollah Mojtaba is one of them because of his qualifications, not because he is Khamenei's son. The decision is not final yet," he told PTI.

Responding to Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz's warning that the next leader could be targeted, Hakeemelahi said Iran is prepared to defend itself.

Khamenei, 86, had served as supreme leader since 1989. His wife later died of injuries from the strike, which also killed his daughter, son-in-law and granddaughter. *—PTI*

- Khamenei, 86, had served as supreme leader since 1989. His wife later died of injuries from the strike, which also killed his daughter, son-in-law and granddaughter.

Kashmir's daily life stays affected post Khamenei protests

SRINAGAR, 5 MARCH

Normal life was affected for the fifth consecutive day in Kashmir as partial restrictions on movement of people remained in force as a precautionary measure.The restrictions were imposed on Monday after spontaneous protests broke out across Kashmir a day earlier against the killing of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in US-Israel joint strikes. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Wednesday held a meeting with civil society representatives and religious leaders as part of efforts to bring the situation back to normalcy. *—PTI*

Cong leader slams Kerala govt over newspaper ads

T'PURAM, 5 MARCH

Senior Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala on Thursday slammed the Kerala government's public relations department (PRD) for giving advertisements in leading English and Malayalam dailies about the alleged shortcomings during the Oommen Chandy administration. Chennithala contended that using public money to issue such advertisements which "hide the good things done by the Oommen Chandy government and spread lies, is an abuse of power and an extravagance" by PRD. The leader further said that PRD was using taxpayer money to run election-related campaigns & warned that none of the officials involved would draw pension. *—PTI*

Shah unveils mascots, launches 4 tools for Census

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Union Home Minister has Amit Shah soft-launched four digital tools that will drive the country's first fully digital Census, with the first phase starting on 1 April. He launched Houselisting Block Creator web application for digital mapping using satellite imagery, which will ensure standardised geographic coverage across the country; the HLO mobile application, which is a secure offline mobile app for enumerators to collect and upload houselisting data; a Self-enumeration portal that will for the first time allow users to submit their household information online before field operations; and core of the Census, the Census Management and Monitoring System. He also formally unveiled the mascots for Census-2027 — 'Pragati' (female) and 'Vikas' (male). *—PTI*

RAJYA SABHA ELECTIONS

Race heats up as parties file nominations across states

Nominations for the biennial Rajya Sabha elections scheduled on March 16 gathered pace across several states on Thursday, with candidates from major parties filing their papers. In many states, the outcome appears largely predetermined due to the existing strength of parties in the respective assemblies.

BIHAR

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and BJP state President **Nitin Nabin** were among five NDA candidates who filed nominations for Rajya Sabha seats in Patna.

They submitted their papers in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah at the Assembly Secretariat. Other NDA nominees include BJP leader Shivesh Kumar, JD(U)'s Ram Nath Thakur, and Upendra Kushwaha of the Rashtriya Lok Morcha. The NDA holds 202 seats in the 243-member Assembly, making the victory of its candidates almost certain. Despite lacking sufficient numbers, the RJD's Amarendra Dhari Singh also filed his nomination.

WEST BENGAL

In West Bengal, the ruling TMC and the BJP filed nominations for five Rajya Sabha seats. The TMC has fielded minister Babul Supriyo, former state DGP Rajeev Kumar, senior Supreme Court advocate **Menaka Guruswamy**, and actor Koel Mallick. If elected, Guruswamy will be India's first openly LGBTQ+ MP.

The BJP has nominated former state unit president Rahul Sinha.

Given its strength in the 294-member Assembly, TMC is expected to win four seats, while BJP is likely to secure one. The election markS the first time since Independence that the Left has no representation from West Bengal in the Rajya Sabha.

MAHARASHTRA

Six candi dates of the ruling Maha yuti alliance, including Union Mini ster **Ramdas Athawale** and BJP leader Vinod Tawde, along with Opposition MVA nominee Sharad Pawar, are set to be elected unopposed to the Rajya Sabha.

On the final day for filing nominations for the seven seats from Maharashtra, only seven candidates submitted papers at the Vidhan Bhawan in Mumbai.

BJP has fielded Ramrao Wadkute and Maya Ivnate in addition to Tawde. Shiv Sena has nominated party spokesperson Jyoti Waghmare. Of seven seats, BJP can secure three seats comfortably and contend for a fourth.

HARYANA

In Haryana, a contest is on the cards after **Satish Nandal**, BJP state vice-presi dent, filed nomination as an Independent. He joins BJP candidate Sanjay Bhatia and Congress nominee Karamvir Singh Boudh in the race for two seats. The 90-member Assembly currently has 48 BJP MLAs, 37 from Congress, two from INLD and three Independents.

TAMIL NADU

In Tamil Nadu, AIADMK MP **M Thambi** durai and PMK leader Anbu mani Rama doss filed their nominations for the Rajya Sabha polls. The PMK was allotted one of the seats. Based on the current Assembly strength, the ruling DMK is expected to win four of the six seats, while AIADMK alliance is set to secure the remaining two.

TELANGANA

In Telangana, Congress nominees **Abhishek Singhvi** and Vem Naren der Reddy filed their nominations at the Assembly in Hyderabad. With the opposition BRS not indicating any candidate, both the Congress nominees are expected to be elected unopposed.

Pawar, grandnephew Parth set to be Rajya Sabha MPs

MUMBAI, 5 MARCH

Two members of Maharashtra's influential Pawar family could soon serve together in the Rajya Sabha, as veteran politician Sharad Pawar and his grandnephew Parth Pawar filed nominations on Thursday for the 16 March elections.

Pawar, 85, chief of Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar faction), is the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi candidate.

Parth, son of the late Ajit Pawar, has been fielded by the ruling Nationalist Congress Party.

If elected, it will be the first time the two serve simultaneously in Parliament.

Parth's mother Sunetra Pawar, now Maharashtra's Deputy Chief Minister and NCP president, continues as a Rajya Sabha member, while Pawar's daughter Supriya Sule is the Lok Sabha MP from Baramati.

Ajit Pawar died in a plane crash in Baramati on January 28.

Parth earlier contested the 2019 Lok Sabha election from Maval but lost and was recently in the news over a controversial Rs 300-crore land deal in Pune that was later cancelled.

The Opposition bloc can secure one of the seven seats, while ruling alliance is poised to win six. *—PTI*

EC grants registration to Humayun Kabir's political outfit

KOLKATA, 5 MARCH

The Election Commission of India has granted registration to Bharatpur MLA **Humayun Kabir**'s political outfit, Aam Janata Unnayan Party, marking a key step towards its formal recognition, a senior official said on Thursday.

The party must now publish advertisements in newspapers announcing the formation of the new political organisation. If no objections are raised within the stipulated period, the commission will grant it full recognition, following which the party can apply for an election symbol.

The office of the Chief Electoral Officer of West Bengal had earlier recommended the registration of Kabir's party to the poll panel after confirming that all procedural requirements had been fulfilled.

Sources said the process could normally take up to 15 days if all formalities are in order, but the commission approved the registration earlier than expected.

Kabir had announced the formation of his party on 22 December last year and unveiled its manifesto soon after. *—PTI*

—INSTAGRAM

Man booked for duping actor Varsha Usgaonkar

MUMBAI, 5 MARCH

The Mumbai police registered a case against a man for allegedly cheating actor Varsha Usgaonkar and four others of Rs 47 lakh promising high returns. An official from Shivaji Park police station said the action against the accused Avinash Jadhav came on a complaint by Mrinalini Subhash Jambhale. In her complaint, Jambhale said Jadhav had persuaded her to invest in a construction project in Dombivli. Jadhav promised "high" returns within a year. Between November 2019 and February 2020, the complainant, Usgaonkar and three others, invested Rs 47 lakh. Initially, the accused reportedly paid Rs 4.52 lakh. However, payments did not come subsequently. When Varsha Usgaonkar tried to contact Avinash Jadhav his phone was switched off —*PTI*

—ANI

CJI meets Bhutan king, offers help to digitalise judiciary

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Thursday met the King of Bhutan, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, in Thimphu and offered support for technical assistance and development of best practices in the digitisation and digitalisation of judicial processes in the Himalayan nation. A press statement issued by the Supreme Court said CJI Kant received an audience with the king and both exchanged views to strengthen ties between India and Bhutan. "CJI Kant offered extensive support for development of best practices in the digitisation of judicial processes in Bhutan," a statement said. —*PTI*

Jumbo runs amok at Alappuzha fest, mahout injured

LAPPUZHA, 5 MARCH

One of the three elephants brought for a temple festival near Nooranad here turned violent, injuring its mahout and damaging several vehicles, police said on Thursday. The jumbo was later tranquilised by wildlife officials and removed. The mahout is undergoing treatment at the Kottayam medical college. The incident occurred between 8.30 pm and 9 pm on Wednesday as the elephant was being taken to the Thirumanimangalam Mahadevar temple as part of the shrine's festival. The elephant suddenly became violent and threw away its mahout, creating panic in the area. —*PTI*

—INSTAGRAM

Sonu offers free shelter to those stranded in Dubai

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Actor Sonu Sood has announced free accommodation for travellers stranded in Dubai following flight disruptions triggered by the US-Iran conflict. Taking to X on Wednesday, Sood shared a video message, offering shelter to those left without a place to stay irrespective of nationality. "War has left many stranded in Dubai. If you or someone you know has nowhere to stay, we are offering accommodation free. No nationality. No conditions. DM us on Instagram," the actor wrote. —*PTI*

Prayers at any spot not religious right, says HC

Says no to namaz near Mumbai airport citing security

MUMBAI, 5 MARCH

Security overrides religion, the Bombay High Court said on Thursday while refusing relief to taxi and auto-rickshaw drivers who wanted to offer namaz at the site of a now demolished temporary shed near the city airport during Ramzan.

A bench of Justices BP Colabawalla and Firdosh Pooniwalla said that while Ramzan was an integral part of Islam, its adherents cannot claim to have a right to pray at any place during the holy month, especially near an airport where security concerns are high.

Repeatedly stressing airport security, the HC said it will not throw caution to the wind.

The court was hearing a petition filed by the Taxi-Rickshaw Ola-Uber Men's Union claiming that a temporary shed near the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA), where they used to pray, was demolished by authorities last year.

Stressing security the HC said that safety concerns are high near airports —*PTI*

The plea sought permission for them to use the same space or be allotted another site in the same area where they could conduct namaz.

Muslims are observing the holy month of Ramzan, a period involving fasting from dawn to sunset, prayers, charity and spiritual reflection.

Last week, the court had directed the police and airport authorities to check if any other space can be allotted to the petitioners.

On Thursday, the authorities submitted a report, saying seven other sites were surveyed, but none were found to be suitable to be allotted to the petitioners for prayers due to congestion, security concerns and airport development plans.

The court, after examining the report, observed it cannot grant any relief to the petitioners as the issue pertains to the security of the airport and passengers. — *PTI*

REASON UNKNOWN

Emergency sirens go off at Aruvankadu defence factory

UDHAGAMANDALAM, 5 MARCH

Tension gripped the defence factory at Aruvankadu in Nilgiris district in Tamil Nadu after the factory authorities sounded an emergency siren asking workers to immediately vacate the premises on Thursday.

The officials also used the public address system to ask the workers to evacuate the premises, a police official said.

Although the exact cause for sounding the emergency siren is not known, the police said that officials from the army and a team of police officials rushed to the Cordite factory at Aruvankadu to investigate.

The premier defence unit specialising in producing propellants for military ammunition, tanks and armoured vehicles is located between Coonoor and Ooty. — *PTI*

The defence unit produces propellants for ammunition, tanks and armoured vehicles and is located between Coonoor and Ooty —*PTI*

Girl's body found after fire destroys 100 huts in Delhi's Rithala area

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

A massive fire swept through shanties in Delhi's Rithala area early on Thursday, killing a 17-year-old girl and destroying around 100 huts leavening many families homeless.

Fire fighters pulled out the charred body of the girl who was initially reported missing after the fire.

The blaze that was reported to authorities at 4.15 am spread rapidly through the densely packed shanties, triggering panic among residents who rushed out of their huts.

Residents said the shanty cluster was home to migrant labourers from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal and other states who worked as daily wage workers in factories, construction sites and small establishments.

Firefighters at the site after a massive blaze destroyed huts in the Rithala area of Delhi on Thursday —*PTI*

The Delhi Fire Services (DFS) launched a large-scale fire fighting operation and deployed 18 fire tenders.

After the fire was brought under control, fire fighters recovered the charred body of a teenage girl. Officials said the blaze spread quickly as the huts contained plastic sheets, wooden planks and cloth.

Fire fighters and police carried out rescue operations and managed to bring the fire under control by 6.30 am.

Police said the cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained and an investigation is underway. — *PTI*

Kerala HC rejects PIL against 'The Kerala Story 2'

KOCHI, 5 MARCH

The Kerala High Court refused to entertain a PIL seeking to change the title of the film 'The Kerala Story 2–Goes Beyond' and pulled up the petitioners for casting aspersions on the division bench, which paved the way for the movie's release.

A bench of Chief Justice Soumen Sen and Justice Syam Kumar VM severely criticised certain remarks in the PIL by Chandramohanan KC, a retired teacher and social activist, and Mehnaz P Mohammed, a lawyer.

When the matter was taken up on Thursday, the bench pointed out that petitions about the movie were pending before a single bench and a division bench and therefore, it would not be appropriate for it to take up the PIL.

Chief Justice Sen said it would be better that the division bench, which is hearing the appeal by the film's producers, hears the matter.

However, when it noted certain remarks in the PIL, filed through advocate Chelson Chembarathy, the Chief Justice asked why such comments were included in the petition. It criticised the petitioners for filing such a PIL, following which advocate Chembarathy apologised unconditionally. — *PTI*

Woman pours hot water on gandson for spraying paint

NAGPUR, 5 MARCH

Enraged over her four-year-old grandson spraying paint on her, his grandmother allegedly poured boiling water on the child, resulting in injuries, in the Koradi area of Nagpur district, police said on Wednesday. The incident, which occurred on 3 March in Aramshin area, was captured on CCTV.

Police said Om Harish Wange, 4, was playing outside his house with a spray bottle filled with paint. He accidentally sprayed paint on his grandmother, Sindhu Thackeray, who was filling a bucket with hot water. Enraged, she allegedly poured the boiling water on the boy," a police official said.

Om suffered 45 per cent burns below the waist and was admitted to a hospital in Nagpur. — *PTI*

Plane crash: CID grills VSR Ventures officials

PUNE, 5 MARCH

The Maharashtra CID on Thursday questioned top executives from VSR Ventures, the operator of the Learjet 45 that crashed near the Baramati airstrip on January 28. The disaster claimed the lives of Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar and four others.

The accidental death case, initially registered at Baramati Taluka police station, was later transferred to the Pune CID, which has said its focus is to ascertain whether sabotage or criminal negligence led to the tragedy. According to a source, the CID had also sent a set of questions to VSR Ventures in connection with the investigation.

The Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB), in its 22-page preliminary report, said visibility at the time of the crash was below the required level, and flagged fading marks and loose gravel on the runway surface. NCP (SP) MLA Rohit Pawar alleged on Wednesday that someone was trying to save VSR Ventures, and claimed the AAIB's preliminary findings vindicated doubts he had earlier raised.

Ajit Pawar's son Jay Pawar, has shared a purported video on social media alleging that VSR Ventures owner Rohit Singh was seen dozing off in the chief pilot's seat during a flight, and demanded his immediate arrest.

Jay Pawar also demanded that all VSR Ventures aircraft be grounded until the inquiry into his father's crash is completed. — *PTI*

Bizman gets bail in accident involving his minor son

MUMBAI, 5 MARCH

A Mumbai court has granted bail to a businessman arrested in connection with a fatal car accident caused by his minor son, noting that prima facie the father had no knowledge of the boy taking out the vehicle.

Additional Judge RM Jadhav on Wednesday allowed his bail on a bond of Rs 50,000 mainly relying on the statement of the watchman of the building where the businessman stays. The accident occurred on 5 February in Ghatkopar.

The minor son of the businessman was driving a Kia Seltos when it collided with a scooter, leading to the death of its rider Dhrumil Patel. The deceased's wife Meenal suffered grievous injuries.

The boy's father was arrested on 10 February and booked for culpable homicide. He argued that he was neither present at the accident spot nor was driving the vehicle. He claimed he had no knowledge of his son taking the vehicle for a drive. — *PTI*

India calls on world to fight terror

UNITED NATIONS, 5 MARCH

India has called on the international community to act together against ISIS and Al Qaeda and their proxies, underlining that terrorism is an "existential threat" to international peace and security, First Secretary in the Permanent Mission of India to the UN Raghoo Puri said on Wednesday.

In remarks to the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) annual ambassadorial-level briefing to Member States, Puri recalled the April 2025 terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir, carried out by The Resistance Front, a proxy of Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba, a UN-listed terror organisation. The terror attack led to the death of 26 tourists.

India added its voice in stressing on the importance of the Global Counter Terrorism Strategy (GCTS) as a central instrument for multilateral cooperation.

Puri said India will continue to remain engaged in the consultations for the 9th review of the GCTS, assuring full cooperation with co-facilitators Finland and Morocco during negotiations. He highlighted India's role as the 2022 Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) Chair during meetings in New Delhi and Mumbai. — *PTI*

M'RASHTRA TRANSPORTERS DEFER STIR AFTER MIN'S OFFER

MUMBAI, 5 MARCH

The Maharashtra Transport Action Committee (M-TAC) announced on Thursday that it was deferring its indefinite strike, which was set to begin at midnight, after receiving a written assurance from state transport minister Pratap Sarnaik that their issues will be addressed after the Budget session ends.

"As per the minister's request, the strike has been postponed for a week. So there will be no strike from midnight," said Anil Garg, a leader of the School Bus Owners Association, which is part of M-TAC.

Harsh Kotak, another leader of private bus owners, said besides Sarnaik's written assurance regarding issues related to e-challans and other concerns, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde also spoke to them and assured them that their grievances would be resolved.

"A meeting is likely to be held next week, after which we will decide about the strike. He has agreed to consider our demands." Kotak said. — *PTI*

RUCKUS OVER CASTE

Teachers' body seeks Centre's stand on JNU V-C's remarks

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

The Jawaharlal Nehru University Teachers' Association (JNUTA) wrote an open letter to Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Thursday seeking clarity on the Centre's position regarding the alleged controversial remarks on caste by JNU Vice-Chancellor Santishree Dhulipudi Pandit.

The teachers' body said the V-C's comments, made during a podcast which has been widely circulated online, were "shocking" and warranted a response from the Union Ministry of Education.

In the letter to the Union education minister, the JNUTA argued that the remarks created an impression that the Centre endorsed her views.

The association reiterated its demand for Pandit's removal from the V-C, noting that it had earlier made similar representations.

JNUTA also criticised what it described as the education ministry's silence over the issue, contrasting it with the police action taken when JNU students attempted to march to the ministry on 26 February.

The teachers' body said the lack of response has raised questions about the Centre's commitment to addressing caste discrimination in higher education institutions.

The association raised concerns over alleged misuse of the 'None Found Suitable' provision in faculty recruitment for reserved posts, "discrimination" in promotions, and alleged decline in the representation of women and students from the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe categories. — *PTI*

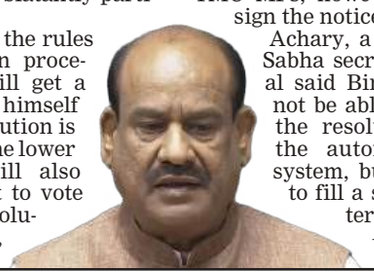
No trust motion: Speaker Birla won't chair LS meet

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

The Lok Sabha will witness a rare moment most likely on next Monday when Om Birla will not chair proceedings but will be seated amongst the members as the House takes up a notice seeking his removal from office.

As Parliament meets for the second phase of the Budget session on 9 March, the Lok Sabha is likely to take up the resolution moved by the opposition against Birla for allegedly acting in a "blatantly partisan" manner.

According to the rules and laid down procedure, Birla will get a right to defend himself when the resolution is discussed by the lower house. He will also have the right to vote against the resolution, Constitution expert PDT Achary explained.



118 opposition members had submitted a notice for moving the resolution to remove Birla from office for not allowing Leader of Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi and other opposition leaders to speak in the House on the Motion of Thanks to the President's address, as well as for suspending eight MPs.

Congress chief whip K Suresh submitted the notice to the Lok Sabha secretariat. TMC MPs, however, did not sign the notice.

Achary, a former Lok Sabha secretary general said Birla will also not be able to vote on the resolution using the automated vote system, but will have to fill a slip to register his vote. — *PTI*

KSU activists who 'attacked' Kerala Min Veena sent to custody

KANNUR, 5 MARCH

A court here on Thursday sent KSU activists accused of "attempting to murder" Kerala Health Minister Veena George to two days' police custody.

Judicial First Class Magistrate EV Raphael granted the custody of MC Athul, VV Akshay, Bithul Balan, Mubas H and Ahmed Yassin to the Kannur Railway police, investigating the case, till Friday evening.

he magistrate had dismissed the bail petitions of the accused after the police claimed that the probe against them was in a preliminary stage. The accused were later shifted to a police station. The incident occurred on 25 February, when KSU activists protested against George at the Kannur Rail Station over medical negligence. — *PTI*

FAITH AMID WAR

Ultra-Orthodox Jewish men celebrate the festival of Purim in Jerusalem amid the ongoing war with Iran. Purim is a holiday marking the salvation of the Jewish people from a genocide plot in ancient Persia *-PTI*

Pak mulls fuel curbs, price revisions after Hormuz shut

Both petrol and diesel have over 5,00,000 tonnes of stocks, enough for 26 and 25 days' cover *-PTI*

Pakistan is considering various measures, including weekly petroleum price revision, compensating oil companies and mandatory work from home, to "keep markets liquid" amid the disruption of trade following the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a media report said on Thursday.

A summary is being submitted to the Federal Cabinet's Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) in this regard for action without delay as petroleum prices appeared to surge, the Dawn newspaper reported citing sources.

However, even before the ECC takes these decisions, the state-run Pakistan State Oil (PSO), after the government's approval, has launched two import tenders each for petrol and diesel outside the Strait of Hormuz as a precaution.

The Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway, connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman, through which about a fifth of the world's oil passes.

The Strait was effectively closed following several attacks on ships by Iran in retaliation to joint US, Israel strikes.

Both petrol and diesel have over 5,00,000 tonnes of stocks, enough for 26 and 25 days' cover, the Dawn reported.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has already been requested to provide oil supplies through an alternative Red Sea route, it said.

According to officials, the government had directed all provincial chief secretaries to attend the meeting of the newly-created 18-member cabinet committee to monitor petroleum prices scheduled for Thursday.

The meeting will consider mandatory work from home wherever possible for the public and private sectors. The meeting could consider other measures as well, with the coordination of the provinces.

While petrol imports continue to be in the safe zone, diesel imports are not; Pakistan heavily relies on long-term supplies from Kuwait with PSO and all those cargoes have to move through the Strait of Hormuz.

Additionally, more than 20 per cent of global oil cargoes are reportedly stuck inside the Strait, creating a shortage of ships for diesel.

The officials further said insurance costs for oil companies have surged from around USD 30,000 to USD 4,00,000 per ship, in addition to import premiums for petroleum products.

The current pricing is around USD 3-5 per barrel, the prices at which the PSO had booked cargoes in February but which is no longer the case as fresh orders are placed.

As a result, freight costs have also surged as the ship rate has gone beyond USD 4 million, which was available for no more than USD 9,00,000 before the crisis, the report said.

The combination of these three factors is exponential and could not be expected of the oil marketing companies (OMCs) and refineries to absorb.

Therefore, a summary to the ECC would provide a mechanism for payment of these additional exigencies to keep OMCs afloat and, in return, maintain their supply chain down to the retail stage.

The fortnightly price revision is also being shifted to a weekly basis immediately to avoid a fiscal bulge on OMCs and the government by recovering the true costs of fuel supplies from consumers on a continuous basis and ensuring smooth supplies as well.

One official said that the price gap has risen to PKR 45-50 for diesel and around PKR 25-26 for petrol in the first week of the crisis and could grow over the next 15 days, and hence needed to be nipped in the bud.

Notwithstanding hue and cry from dealers over limited supplies, the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) and OMCs have jointly decided to provide petrol and diesel supplies to dealers and retailers on the respective 8-month track record and have stopped unlimited supplies to avoid supply disruptions.

"Still, there was no shortage of petrol or diesel anywhere in the country," a senior government official said.

In response to dealers' complaints that OMCs were not honouring product orders, OGRA said that to ensure the uninterrupted availability of petroleum products and to discourage hoarding during periods of extreme price volatility, the companies may temporarily regulate supplies to retail outlets based on their historical sales patterns.

"This measure is a standard supply management practice aimed at maintaining stability in the distribution system," the authority said.

It reassured the public that the country currently had adequate stocks of petrol and diesel, well within the required limits.

"There is no shortage of petroleum products. Citizens are advised not to pay attention to rumours and to rely only on information issued through official channels," it said. *—PTI*

SALAR

Blackout leaves millions without power in Cuba

Officials said it could take at least 72 hours to restore operations at the Antonio Guiteras thermoelectric power plant *-PIXABAY*

A massive blackout left millions without electricity across Havana and much of western Cuba on Wednesday, underscoring the island's deepening energy crisis, even as tensions escalated abroad with Ecuador ordering Cuba's ambassador and diplomatic staff to leave the country.

The outage, triggered by a shutdown at one of Cuba's largest thermoelectric plants, affected areas stretching from the western town of Pinar del Río to the central city of Camagüey, according to the state-run electric utility.

Officials said it could take at least 72 hours to restore full operations at the Antonio Guiteras thermoelectric power plant east of Havana, where a pipe burst in the boiler, causing a water leak and a subsequent fire. The blaze was extinguished without major damage, but technicians must first locate and repair the fault before the unit can restart.

Energy and Mines Minister Vicente de la O Levy said authorities had begun restoring power to critical infrastructure as two power plants came online. Hospitals and medical clinics were prioritised as crews attempted to stabilise the fragile system.

By late afternoon, the government said electricity had been restored to about 2.5 per cent of Havana, roughly 21,100 customers, but warned that progress would be gradual and dependent on the condition of the grid.

The US Embassy in Havana urged residents to prepare for "significant disruptions" and conserve essential supplies, including fuel, water, food and mobile phone batteries.

"Cuba's national power grid is increasingly unreliable, and scheduled and unscheduled power outages are prolonged and a daily occurrence across the country, including Havana," the embassy said on X.

For many residents, however, outages have become part of daily life.

As darkness fell over the capital, families gathered on doorsteps while neighbours cooked "caldosas", a traditional soup prepared collectively using ingredients such as vegetables, chicken and meat. Along Havana's iconic seawall, musicians played late into the night while others passed time playing dominoes under rechargeable lightbulbs.

"With the power outages, this is the only thing we young people have to distract ourselves," said Jeferson Silvera.

For 66-year-old Genoveva Torres, who had been waiting for electricity to return to cook dinner, news of the widespread blackout brought frustration.

"My God, until when?" she said. "Then we won't eat. We'll have to eat bread again."

The outage also disrupted transportation and daily routines. Odalis Sánchez, 63, who recently underwent surgery, found herself stranded outside with her grandson while trying to return home. With buses not running due to fuel shortages, around 200 people waited at a bus stop hoping to find a ride, even attempting to hitchhike.

"I need to be able to get home to see what I can do," Sánchez said. "Without power, you can't do anything. My grandson is studying and I have to make him food. Public transportation isn't helping."

It is the second major outage to hit western Cuba in the past three months. A blackout in early December lasted nearly 12 hours after a fault in a transmission line linking two power plants caused an overload and the collapse of the western sector of the energy system. Cuba's government has long warned that much of the country's power infrastructure is ageing and poorly maintained. Several thermoelectric plants have been operating for more than 30 years and require costly repairs that the government says it struggles to fund.

Officials also blame US sanctions for preventing the purchase of new equipment and specialised parts.

The situation has worsened in recent months due to dwindling oil supplies. Cuba relied heavily on fuel shipments from Venezuela, but deliveries have declined after a US military operation in early January removed Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro from power. Washington has also threatened tariffs on countries that continue to supply oil to Cuba.

Last month Havana introduced strict fuel-saving measures and warned that jet fuel would not be available at nine airports until mid-March.

Despite the hardship, some residents expressed determination to endure.

Meanwhile, diplomatic tensions involving Cuba flared in South America.

Ecuador on Wednesday declared Cuba's ambassador, Basilio Antonio Gutiérrez, and his diplomatic staff "persona non grata" and ordered them to leave the country within 48 hours.

The diplomatic rupture comes as Ecuador strengthens ties with the United States. On Tuesday, Washington and Quito announced joint military operations targeting organised crime groups in the Andean nation, where violence linked to drug trafficking has surged.

Analysts say the expulsion may reflect broader geopolitical alignment.

Relations between Ecuador and Cuba date back to 1960 but have fluctuated with political shifts in Quito.

The latest move follows a series of diplomatic controversies involving Ecuador. In 2024, Ecuadorian security forces raided the Mexican embassy in Quito to arrest a former vice-president who had taken refuge there, prompting Mexico to sever diplomatic relations. *—PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Bihar get its 1st 'BJP sarkar' as Nitish leaves CM seats & heads to RS

- JD(U) Supremo Nitish Kumar's "wish to become a Rajya Sabha member" has paved the way for the formation of a new government, with the BJP now appearing poised to have its "own chief minister" in the only Hindi heartland state where the post has eluded the party. The writing had been on the wall ever since the BJP emerged as the single largest party, with 89 seats, in the assembly polls held less than four months ago

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar files his nomination for Rajya Sabha polls in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP National President Nitin Nabin in Patna on Thursday *-PTI*

JD(U) Supremo Nitish Kumar's "wish to become a Rajya Sabha member" has paved the way for the formation of a new government, with the BJP now appearing poised to have its "own chief minister" in the only Hindi heartland state where the post has eluded the party.

The writing had been on the wall ever since the BJP emerged as the single largest party, with 89 seats, in the assembly polls held less than four months ago, outperforming the JD(U) for the second time after 2020.

In November 2025, Nitish took oath as the Chief Minister for a record 10th time.

The swearing-in ceremony verily looked like a BJP affair, with the party getting a lion's share in the new council of ministers and the all-important Home portfolio. The function was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and a number of their cabinet colleagues, besides CMs of several states ruled by the BJP.

RJD national working president Tejashwi Yadav, the Leader of the Opposition in the assembly, told reporters, "The BJP has done a Maharashtra in Bihar. It is a party that has always been opposed to Dalits and OBCs. Now, it will seek to implement its agenda in the socialist stronghold."

Yadav, the leader of the opposition in the state assembly, alleged the BJP has always been opposed to Dalits and OBCs, and with Kumar leaving the CM's post, it will seek to implement its agenda in the socialist stronghold.

Notably, Kumar, like Yadav's father and RJD supremo Lalu Prasad, has been a product of the Mandal churn of the 1990s, which ended the dominance of upper castes in Bihar politics.

Speculations are rife that the BJP, too, may go for a CM from the weaker sections, mindful of the social realities.

Among the names doing the rounds for the Chief Minister's post is Samrat Choudhary, whom Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the BJP's veritable principal strategist, had vowed to make "a big man" during the Assembly poll campaign.

Choudhary, currently a Deputy Chief with the crucial portfolio of Home, is a Koeri, an OBC caste which has been sore over never having its "own chief minister".

However, it remains to be seen whether the party, known to put a premium on ideology, would be willing to place more trust in Choudhary, who had started off with the RJD and joined the BJP less than a decade ago.

Another name that is doing the rounds is that of Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai, a Sangh Parivar veteran who started off as a fiery ABVP activist when the Ayodhya movement was at its peak.

Rai is a Yadav, the most populous of all castes in Bihar, which has so far been aligned with Lalu Prasad and his RJD.

According to BJP sources, his elevation is "fraught with the risk of annoying the upper castes and alarming the numerically small Kurmis, the caste to which Nitish Kumar belongs, besides extremely backward classes, as these social groups consider the Yadavs to be too aggressive".

BJP sources also admit that the next Chief of Bihar could be one of the less fancied leaders of the party, as was seen recently in states like Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi and Odisha. A BJP leader, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said, "We must not completely rule out the possibility of an upper caste chief minister. We have demonstrated that the BJP has a place for all. But the Mandal agitation had given rise to an unhealthy impression that henceforth the post of CM in states shall be out of bounds for the upper castes." "The BJP has successfully changed that perception in UP, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, where the caste dynamics are very much in place, but the top post was given on merit. There is no reason why it should not be the case in Bihar as well, given the fact that we have decimated casteist parties like RJD in the last assembly polls," he added.

Meanwhile, the JD(U) is in turmoil, with a diminution in its clout almost certain. It is being speculated that Nitish Kumar's son Nishant, whose entry into politics was announced two days back, notwithstanding the father's aversion to "dynasty politics", could be accommodated as a Deputy CM. A JD(U) leader, who did not wish to be named, however, said, "Things are never going to be the same again for us. All ministers in our party, even if these include the son of 'saheb' (Nitish Kumar) shall now have to depend on the BJP's goodwill for survival." *—PTI*

AYATOLLAH ISSUES FATWA FOR TRUMP'S BLOOD

US tests 'Doomsday' missile as strikes continue; Lebanon suffers

1,230 people have been killed in Iran by US strikes

Tracer rounds light the sky during a televised speech by Hezbollah leader Naim Kassem in Dahiyeh, Lebanon on Wednesday —PTI

DUBAI, 5 MARCH

Iranian Ayatollah Abdollah Javadi Amoli issued a fatwa calling for US President Donald Trump's "blood" to avenge the assassination of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Amoli, in one of the few clerical statements so far from Iran, said on state television on Thursday that it is an "obligation for all Muslims to "the shedding of Zionist blood, the shedding of Trump's blood."

"Fight the oppressive America, his blood is on my shoulders," he said in a rare call for violence from an Ayatollah, one of the highest ranks within the clergy of Shiite Islam.

A fatwa is a religious order issued by top Islamic clerics that calls on followers to perform a certain act. Khamenei was killed by Israeli and US strikes on 28 February.

Meanwhile, the US has begun testing its unarmed Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile, known as the 'Doomday missile' on Tuesday in Florida. Which is capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

This comes as Iran continued to trade strikes with Israel while targeting US bases in the region.

Plumes of smoke rise as strikes hit the city from a US-Israeli military campaign in Tehran, Iran on Thursday —PTI

CIVILIANS BEAR THE BRUNT

The number of people Israel has killed in Lebanon has risen to 77, after it reignited attacks claiming to target Hezbollah, the Lebanese health ministry said.

It was not clear how many of the casualties were civilians. The health ministry had earlier said that seven children were killed.

After the attacks by the US and Israel on Iran triggered a new war, Hezbollah launched missiles and drones into Israel on Monday for the first time in over a year, and Israel has retaliated with bombardment of southern Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs.

More than 83,000 people have been displaced in Lebanon by the renewed conflict. At least 38,000 people have crossed from Lebanon into Syria, the UN said.

TANKERS HIT

At least nine oil tankers have been struck since the war began. A Bahamas-flagged crude oil tanker was allegedly targeted by an Iranian remote-controlled boat laden with explosives while anchored near Iraq's Khor al Zubair port, according to initial assessments, Reuters reported.

A second tanker at anchor off Kuwait was taking on water and spilling oil after a large explosion on its port side.

Hundreds of oil ships remained in limbo near the the Gulf of Oman and Strait of Hormuz, as Iran has said that the crucial oil passage way is now a "war zone". —*Agencies*

> **Continue to the end, we are with you**
>
> —Pete Hegseth, US Defence Secretary to Israeli counterpart Israel Katz

> **We adhered to the ceasefire agreement of 27 November, 2024, alongside the Lebanese state, but Israel did not adhere to a single clause.... Patience has limits**
>
> —Sheikh Naim Qassem, Hezbollah leader

$3 BILLION per week is what the war on Iran would cost for Israel, the Israeli Finance Ministry said, urging the government to open business activities

Iran has **THREATENED** to strike Israel's Dimona nuclear sites. Israel claims it doesn't have nuclear bombs, but that is globally disregarded

Israel bombed a hospital in Iran, killing at least **3 PEOPLE**

Australia said it **DEPLOYED** military assets to West Asia to evacuate its citizens, following a similar statement from New Zealand

The White House said that Spain agreed to provide its bases for military strikes, which Madrid quickly said was **UNTRUE**

NORTH KOREAN Leader Kim Jong Un inspected a naval destroyer, as he vowed to build a nuclear-armed Navy

Sri Lanka says second Iranian ship awaits entry

COLOMBO, 5 MARCH

Sri Lanka on Thursday said it is deliberating appropriate action after a second Iranian ship sought entry to its territorial waters, a day after an Islamic Republic frigate was attacked near the nation.

Sri Lanka on Wednesday said it had recovered 80 bodies of Iranian sailors killed after a US submarine attack sank the Iranian frigate - IRIS Dena - off Galle.

Responding to a question, Government Spokesman and Minister Nalinda Jayathissa said: "We are aware of it and are contemplating action to safeguard all lives on board. We are intervening to resolve this issue to safeguard regional peace."

The ship, according to Jayathissa, awaits in Sri Lanka's Extended Economic Zone (EEZ) but is out of its territorial waters.

Sources said the ship had requested emergency assistance.

Meanwhile, in Galle, the crew of the ship torpedoed by the US were receiving treatment. Their injuries are not of serious nature, the hospital sources said. The ship was returning home from Visakhapatnam after a naval fleet review exercise. —*PTI*

COUNTRIES IMPACTED BY THE WAR

- Israel
- Iran
- Iraq
- Saudi Arabia
- Qatar
- Oman
- Kuwait
- Jordan
- Azerbaijan
- Lebanon
- Cyprus
- Turkey
- Syria
- Bahrain

A shepherd boy walks away from an unexploded Iranian projectile in the outskirts of eastern Syria on Wednesday —PTI

IRANIAN DRONE ATTACKS AZERBAIJAN

Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry on Thursday accused Iran of carrying out a drone attack against its exclave of Nakhchivan. One drone crashed near the airport in Nakhchivan and another one near a school, the ministry said in a statement, injuring two civilians. Iran did not acknowledge targeting Azerbaijan, but its envoy has been summoned.

US SENATE VOTES IN FAVOUR OF IRAN WAR

The Unites States Senate voted against a resolution to halt Trump's strikes on Iran. The legislation, known as a war powers resolution, failed on a 47-53 vote tally. The vote fell mostly along party lines. The resolution gave lawmakers an opportunity to demand congressional approval before any further attacks are carried out.

WEST ASIA WAR DAY-6

IRAN DENIES TARGETING TURKEY

Iran on Thursday denied firing a missile towards Turkish airspace. On Wednesday, Turkey said that NATO shot down a missile that was heading toward Turkish airspace. It was not clear where the missile was headed. NATO has condemned Iran's alleged strike but Article 5, which states that an attack on one is an attack on all, has not been invoked.

UK SAYS DRONE NEAR CYPRUS NOT FROM IRAN

The UK Defence Ministry said in a statement that the Shahed-like drone intercepted near its RAF Akrotiri airbase in Cyprus was not launched from Iran, without elaborating. This comes as UK and France have sent ships and jets to the Mediterranean. Iran has claimed without evidence that Israel had attacked some Gulf states.

GAZA FACES FUEL CRISIS, THREAT OF FLOODS

UN warns that the Gaza Strip faces a severe cooking gas shortage—about 70 per cent below needs amid a massive Israeli blockaid. Aid workers call for lifting the restrictions, restoring steady aid supplies and medical evacuations. Moreover, over 900 out of nearly 1,500 sites across Gaza are at risk of flooding should the rainy season continue, the UN said.

Kurdish groups prep for ops with US support

IRBIL, 5 MARCH

Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish dissident groups based in northern Iraq are preparing for a potential cross-border military operation in Iran, officials said. The US has asked the Kurds to support them.

Khalil Nadiri, an official with the Kurdistan Freedom Party, or PAK, based in northern Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region, said on Wednesday that some of their forces had moved to areas near the Iranian border in Sulaymaniyah province and were on standby.

Iraqi Kurds are 'preparing' a ground offensive against Iran —X @SENTDEFENDER

The Kurdish groups are widely seen as the most well-organised segment of the Iranian Opposition and are believed to have thousands of trained fighters. Their entry into the war could pose a significant challenge to Tehran and could also risk pulling Iraq further into the conflict.

If the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish groups were to join the war, it would be the first entry of a significant ground force into the battle.

Notably, Kurdish groups were instrumental in US' fight against ISIS in Syria.

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth on Wednesday dodged a question on whether the US was arming Kurdish groups after dozens of US helicopters were reportedly seen in Iraq.

However, Iraqi Kurdish leaders said that Trump had spoken to Masoud Barzani and Bafel Talabani, head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan on Sunday. —*PTI*

Israel sprayed chemicals in Lebanon as part of a **'SCORCHED EARTH'** policy to prevent cultivation, in February, said Euro Med Monitor

CONFIDENT RUSSIA IS SUPPLYING IRAN WITH WEAPONS, SAYS UKRAINE PRESIDENT

KYIV, 5 MARCH

Russian President Vladimir Putin is not acting as Iran's ally, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Thursday, citing Moscow's silence over the collapse of Syria's Bashar al-Assad regime. "They do not have the capacity for it. All their forces are buried in Ukrain."

ZZelenskyy said he believes Russia is supplying Iran with weapons, noting that Shahed drones used have Russian-made components

Zelenskyy said that the US and its allies in West Asia are seeking Ukraine's expertise in combating Iran's cheap Shahed drones.

Zelenskyy said Ukraine would share its expertise in exchange for advanced weapons, adding: "We help defend those who help us."

Zelenskyy added that the upcoming trilateral peace talks between Russia, Ukraine and the US are on hold amid the West Asia war.

Russia said Iran has not requested military assistance, with Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirmed that "no requests from the Iranian side." —*AGENCIES*

1 MILLION NEW VOTERS

Nepal votes peacefully in 1st election since Gen Z protest

KATHMANDU, 5 MARCH

Tens of thousands of Nepalese voted on Thursday in the crucial parliamentary elections to elect a new prime minister, six months after violent Gen Z protests toppled the KP Sharma Oli-led coalition government.

The election is being closely watched by India, which hopes for a stable government in the politically fragile nation.

The voting, which began at 7am, concluded in a peaceful and orderly atmosphere at 5 pm, officials said. As per local media reports, voter turnout was between 60 and 68 per cent. However, the final tally was yet be declared at the time of publishing.

Election Commissioner Janaki Kumari Tuladhar said voters who had queued at polling centres by 5 pm were still allowed to cast their ballots. The counting will start immediately after the ballot boxes are collected.

Voting concluded largely peaceful, officials said.

An elderly woman casts her vote in the Nepal general elections, at a polling station in Kathmandu on Thursday —PTI

KEY CANDIDATES

Around 3,400 candidates are vying for 165 seats under direct voting, and 3,135 candidates for 110 seats through proportionate voting.

RSP head Balen Shah, 35, a rap sensation and former mayor of Kathmandu, is a favourite among Nepal's youth to become the Prime Minister. His platform focuses on reform and anti-corruption—goals that resonate with the Gen Z movement.

Nepali Congress – the nation's largest party - President Gagan Thapa is the prime ministerial candidate of his party, whereas the CPN (UML) projected Oli for PM.

Interim PM Sushila Karki said, "my work is done" after casting her vote. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

200 killed in coltan mine collape in Congo

GOMA, 5 MARCH

A major coltan mining site collapsed on Tuesday in eastern Congo. According to Congolese authorities, at least 200 people died, but the toll is disputed by the M23 rebel group that controls the Rubaya mine. M23 rebel group official Fanny Kaj disputed the figure, saying the collapse was caused by "bombings" and that only five people were killed. Ibrahim Taluseke, a miner at the site, said that he had helped to recover over 200 bodies from the area. Rubaya is in a mineral-rich region long scarred by violence, including from Rwanda-backed M23 rebel group. Congo produced about 40 per cent of the world's coltan used in smartphones, computers and aircraft engines. —PTI

Chinese President Xi Jinping stands to acknowledge applause from delegates during the People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China on Wednesday—PTI

China hikes defence budget by 7 per cent

BEIJING, 5 MARCH

China hiked its defence budget by 7 per cent on Thursday to 1.91 trillion yuan (USD 277 billion). The increase aims to accelerate military modernisation to achieve parity with the US military. Announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping and other top leaders at the opening session of the National People's Congress (NPC).

China's defence budget, second only to the United States, has steadily grown, pressuring India and other neighbours to raise spending. The US increased its military budget to USD 1 trillion in 2026.

Another key proposal from the NPC session was lowering the GDP growth target. China, which once posted double-digit growth, has set a 5 per cent target for the past three years amid US tariffs and domestic headwinds such as a property slump and increasing unemployment.

This year, the target was lowered to 4.5 to 5 per cent for the first time, which was seen as an acknowledgement that the world's second-largest economy faced headwinds relying more heavily on external trade due to stagnating domestic consumption. —*PTI*

Pakistan strikes 41 militant posts along Afghan border

PESHAWAR/ ISLAMABAD, 5 MARCH

In a coordinated operation, Pakistani security forces launched ground and aerial strikes against militant positions along the Afghan border on Thursday. Officials stated the offensive targeted outposts in used by the Afghan Taliban and Fitna al-Khawarij militants, formally Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

Pakistan struck 41 militant posts linked to the Afghan Taliban and TTP overnight between Wednesday and Thursday. Reports claim heavy militant casualties.

The strikes are part of 'Operation Ghazab-ul-Haq'.

Meanwhile, during a visit to Wana in, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, on Wednesday, Pakistan Army Chief Gen. Asim Munir reviewed operational preparedness along the Afghan border.

"He reiterated that peace could only prevail between the two sides if the Afghan Taliban renounced their support for terrorism and terrorist organisations," a government statement said. —*Agencies*

GAIL to slash gas supply to some amid shipment block

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

GAIL (India) Ltd is planning to slash natural gas supplies to select customers after roughly 30 per cent of India's imported LNG shipments were blocked due to West Asia conflict.

Following the hostilities, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps warned vessels against transiting the Strait of Hormuz, prompting major insurers to withdraw or sharply raise war-risk coverage and forcing several shipping lines to suspend tanker movements through the route. A bulk of India's liquefied natural gas supplies from Qatar and the UAE flows through the Strait.

GAIL said its LNG supplier has served a force majeure notice "due to constraints faced by certain LNG vessels arising from maritime navigation restrictions related to the Strait of Hormuz." The allocation of LNG quantities to GAIL under the said contract has been reduced to zero with effect from 4 March.

A top oil ministry official said as much as 60 million standard cubic meters per day of gas supplies has been halted due to the blockage.

India consumes 195 mmscmd of gas for generating electricity, producing fertiliser, turning into CNG to run automobiles, fire household kitchens and serve as feedstock for various industries. The situation may warrant re-prioritising gas supplies by imposing cuts on some users. Supplies from alternate sources are being arranged to fill the gap.

Over half of India's LNG imports pass through the strait from suppliers, leaving the country vulnerable to both physical supply disruptions and price shocks. *—PTI*

Rupee rebounds to settle at 91.60 against USD

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

The rupee rebounded from its lowest level and settled with a gain of 41 paise at 91.64 against the US dollar on Thursday on the back of a buying trend in domestic equity markets and suspected RBI intervention. According to forex analysts, the Reserve Bank seems to have intervened to help the local currency from extreme volatility due to uncertainties on the ongoing war involving the US, Israel and Iran. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 92.16 and touched an intraday high of 91.30 against the greenback. The currency ended the session at 91.64 against USD. *—PTI*

MakeMyTrip to acquire major stake in Flamingo

MUMBAI, 5 MARCH

Online travel services provider MakeMyTrip on Thursday said it will acquire a majority stake in regional tour operator Flamingo Transworld for an undisclosed sum. Flamingo Transworld is one of India's leading regional tour operators. The deal is subject to the fulfilment of certain closing conditions, MakeMyTrip said in a statement. Flamingo has 51 offices across Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh in its 30 years of operations. In the recent past, MakeMyTrip has taken a calibrated approach to inorganic growth, with strategic acquisitions, including QuestToTravel in corporate travel bookings, Simplotel in hotel technology, BookMyForex in travel forex, Savaari in intercity mobility and Happay in corporate spend management. *—PTI*

IBM launches its 1st infra innovation centre in India

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

IBM on Thursday announced the launch of its first Infrastructure Innovation Centre, the Sangam Infrastructure Innovation Centre, housed within its new India Systems Development Lab (ISDL) campus. This underscores IBM's investment in India as a strategic hub for advanced infrastructure engineering and AI innovation. The centre will bring together IBM's systems architects and infrastructure specialists from ISDL to co-create AI solutions with clients, Independent Software Vendors, Global System Integrators, Global Capability Centers. A recent study by the IBM Institute for Business Value found that 58 per cent of Indian organisations have increased infrastructure investments due to rising AI demand. *—ANI*

SILVER CLIMBS TO RS 2.67L/KG; GOLD FALLS '1.65L/10G

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Silver prices climbed Rs 1,844 to Rs 2.67 lakh per kilogram in futures trade on Thursday, driven by firm global trends as investors flocked to safe-haven assets amid escalating geopolitical tensions in the Middle East.

However, gold futures for April delivery fell Rs 210, or 0.13 per cent, to Rs 1,61,315 per 10g in a business turnover of 7,445 lots.

On the MCX, the white metal for May delivery climbed Rs 1,844, or 0.69 per cent, to Rs 2,67,404 per kg in a business turnover of 6,353 lots.

Analysts said the white metal tracked gains in international markets as concerns over a prolonged conflict involving Iran kept investors cautious, boosting demand.

Globally, Comex silver futures for May gained $1.07, or 1.29 per cent, to $84.25 per ounce, while gold for the April delivery gained $29.56, or 0.58 per cent, to $5,164.26 per ounce in New York. *—PTI*

India eyes buying Russian oil as Hormuz chokes supply

About 1.4M barrels of Urals crude is being shipped to India

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Amid the ongoing West Asia conflict disrupting the global supply route, India is likely to increase its Russian crude sourcing based on its ship tracking data, according to a Bloomberg report.

The news agency's report stated that two oil tankers that were supposed to head towards East Asia have now detoured their destination to India.

This detour shows the probability of Indian refiners purchasing or being open to purchasing Russian oil again, as the Iran war had disrupted the purchases from West Asia.

The two ships have a combined amount of Urals crude of around 1.4 million barrels, said data from Kpler and Vortexa.

Urals crude is a Russian oil grade that comes from Baltic and Black Sea ports.

Odune, a Suexmax vessel, is reported to be shipping around 730,000 barrels of Urals crude, while Matari, an Aframax vessel, is said to be shipping over 700000 barrels of Urals crude.

Meanwhile, Russia has always been open to supplying crude oil to India, Russian Ambassador Denis Alipov said on Thursday, amid increasing concerns over spiralling prices of petroleum products in view of the West Asia crisis.

Urals crude is a Russian oil grade that comes from Baltic & Black Sea *—PTI*

Global oil and gas prices have surged after Iran has virtually blocked the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow shipping lane between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, that handles roughly 20 per cent of global oil and LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas).

India imports 88 per cent of its crude oil needs and roughly half of its natural gas requirement. These mostly come via the Strait of Hormuz.

"We have been open to supplying crude oil to India," Alipov told reporters while responding to a question on Russian crude oil supplies to India in view of the West Asia crisis. *—Agencies*

MRPL shuts refinery units amid crude shortage

India's Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals (MRPL) has shut a crude unit and some secondary units at its 300,000-barrel-per-day refinery due to oil shortage. Asian refiners are trying to secure replacement crude cargoes as Iranian threats to shipping through the Strait of Hormuz have disrupted crude oil flows. The state-run refiner from 4 March shut the 100,000-barrel-per-day crude unit & secondary units, including a hydrocracker, at its complex in Karnataka, sources said. MRPL is mostly dependent on oil from West Asia. *—Agencies*

2,803 STOCKS ADVANCE

Markets rebound after loss from the West Asia conflict

MUMBAI, 5 MARCH

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty bounced back on Thursday, closing higher by more than 1 per cent in line with a rebound in global equities after recent sharp losses due to the conflict in West Asia.

Snapping its four-day decline, the 30-share BSE Sensex rebounded 899.71 points or 1.14 per cent to settle at 80,015.90. During the day, it surged 1,187.64 points or 1.50 per cent to 80,303.83.

The 50-share NSE Nifty climbed 285.40 points or 1.17 per cent to end at 24,765.90, ending its three-day falling streak.

From the Sensex pack, Adani Ports, Larsen & Toubro, NTPC, Reliance Industries, Bharat Electronics and InterGlobe Aviation were among the major gainers.

Tech Mahindra, HCL Tech, Hindustan Unilever and ICICI Bank were among the laggards.

The BSE smallcap select index jumped 1.74 per cent and midcap select index rallied 1.36 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, services surged the most 2.84 per cent, followed by utilities (2.58 per cent), power (2.41 per cent), metal (2.32 per cent), industrials (2.32 per cent), auto (1.95 per cent), realty (1.91 per cent), energy (1.83 per cent) and commodities (1.72 per cent).

A total of 2,803 stocks advanced, while 1,453 declined and 141 remained unchanged on the BSE. *—PTI*

WORLD MARKETS

DOW (US)	48,169.11	(1.21%) ↓
S&P 500 (US)	6,848.04	(0.62%) ↓
Nasdaq (US)	22,644.39	(0.70%) ↓
Nikkei (Japan)	55,278.06	(1.90%) ↑
Hang Seng CHN	25,321.35	(0.28%) ↑
DAX (Germany)	24,052.86	(0.63%) ↓
FTSE 100 (UK)	10,490.29	(0.73%) ↓
CAC 40 (Paris)	8,084.40	(1.02%) ↓
KOSPI S Korea	5,583.90	(9.63%) ↑

USD 82-84/BARREL

No upside to $63/bbl Brent price for 2026: Fitch

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

The USD 63/bbl estimation for average Brent crude price for 2026 is unlikely to rise significantly as the Strait of Hormuz closure would be only temporary, Fitch Ratings said.

Fitch, the global provider of credit ratings, said the strait is not formally closed, but vessels are avoiding it given the risk of attack by Iran or its proxies. Oil majors halted shipments for safety reasons, and insurers are cancelling war risk cover for vessels.

Also, global oil market oversupply, should limit oil price rises and mitigate any potential disruptions to Iranian oil supply, it added.

Brent crude prices have already risen to USD 82-84 per barrel from an average of USD 66-67 in January-February 2026.

The Strait of Hormuz is a vital artery for seaborne oil transportation, with limited alternative routes.

Before the conflict, around 20 million barrels per day (MMbpd) of crude oil and petroleum products transited the strait, accounting for about a quarter of global seaborne oil trade and a fifth of global oil consumption.

About half of the oil volumes transported through the strait are exports from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, with the remainder from Iraq, Kuwait and Iran. About half of these exports go to China and India.

Oil price volatility would rise if there were to be any material disruption to Iranian oil production. *—PTI*

Indian sectors under threat: Crisil

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

A prolonged war in West Asia could adversely affect several Indian sectors with direct trade exposure to the region.

These include basmati rice, fertilisers, diamond polishing, airlines and travel operators, according to Crisil Ratings.

The rating agency said sectors dependent on imported Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), such as ceramics and fertilisers, may also face production disruptions, while crude-linked industries including oil refiners, tyres, paints could see cost pressures.

Middle Eastern countries account for about 30 per cent of global crude oil and 20 per cent of global LNG production, most transported through the Strait of Hormuz. India imports roughly 85 per cent of its crude oil and about half of its LNG. Alternate trading centres such as Belgium and Hong Kong may partly mitigate the impact.

Most shipping vessels have halted passage through the Strait.

Brent crude prices have already risen to USD 82-84 per barrel from an average of USD 66-67 in January-February 2026.India also imports about two-thirds of its Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG), largely from West Asia.

Freight and insurance costs have also increased amid the tensions, which may affect export- and import-oriented sectors with large global trade exposure. While the immediate impact on most Indian companies is expected to remain limited due to strong balance sheets. *—PTI*

INDIA'S MERCHANDISE TRADE

West Asia accounts for

15%

of total exports & 20% of imports

SECTORAL IMPACT

- Basmati rice exports: 70-72% goes to West Asia
- Diamond exports: 18% goes to Israel and the UAE
- Aviation: 10% of Indian flights transit through West Asia
- Ceramics: 15% exported to West Asia
- Fertiliser: 30% requirements imported. West Asia supplies 40% of India's fertiliser imports

NHAI-backed firm's ₹6,000 crore IPO to open on 11 March

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

State-owned NHAI-sponsored Raajmarg Infra Investment Trust (RIIT) on Thursday fixed a price band of Rs 99 to Rs 100 per unit for its upcoming Rs 6,000-crore Initial Public Offering (IPO).

The InvIT's maiden public offering will open on 11 March and conclude on 13 March, while the bidding for anchor investors will take place on 10 March, according to a public announcement.

Raajmarg Infra Investment Trust would make its stock market debut on 24 March.

Additionally, Manpower and toll plaza management services provider Innovision Ltd on Thursday said its Rs 323-crore initial share-sale will open for public subscription on 10 March.

The price has been fixed in the range of Rs 521-548 per share, valuing the company at nearly Rs 1,300 crore at the higher end.

Meanwhile, the shares of Omnitech Engineering Ltd, a manufacturer of precision-engineered components, on Thursday listed with a discount of 11 per cent against the issue price of Rs 227.

The stock started trading at Rs 205, down 9.69 per cent from the issue price on the BSE.

At the NSE, it began trading at Rs 202, registering a decline of 11 per cent. The company's market valuation stood at Rs 2,629.76 crore. *—PTI*

West Asia war poses risks to economy, says RBI panel

MUMBAI, 5 MARCH

Conflict in the Middle East poses some immediate-term challenges for the Indian economy but is unlikely to dent long-term economic growth momentum, an external member of the RBI's rate-setting panel has said.

Going forward, there is a need for fiscal and monetary policies to work in a coordinated manner to push GDP growth to a higher trajectory, Nagesh Kumar has said.

In the present scenario, a hike in oil prices, exports disruptions and impact on remittances have been identified as the immediate challenges on the growth front, he said.

"The breakout of the Middle East conflict poses some immediate-term challenges for the Indian economy by raising oil prices, disrupting exports destined to the region and the potential loss of remittances, besides threatening security of the Indian diaspora in the region," Kumar told PTI in an e-mailed interview.

In the immediate short run, he noted, the conflict is escalating with US-Israel strikes and oil prices are likely to harden.

"Hopefully, the crisis will be resolved soon, given the high stakes that the world has in the region," he said. Kumar added that diversification of oil sourcing could help mitigate risks.

Despite geopolitical tensions, Kumar maintained that the inflation outlook remains benign. Headline CPI stood at 1.3 per cent in December 2025 and is projected to be around 2.5 per cent in FY2026, even under new data series. *—PTI*

SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION CASE

Meta CEO says he resisted censoring platforms

SANTA FE, 5 MARCH

Jurors in a bellwether trial about the impacts of social media on teenagers and children on Wednesday watched a deposition of Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg that explores what the architects of Facebook and Instagram knew from internal research about the negative experiences by young users and how the company responded since its early years.

Prosecutors are alleging that Meta violated state consumer protection laws in failing to disclose what it knew about the dangers of addiction to social media as well as child sexual exploitation on the company's platforms, while

attorneys for Meta say the company discloses risks, makes efforts to weed out harmful content and experiences, and acknowledges that some bad material still gets through its safety net.

In pretrial depositions recorded last year, prosecutors confronted Zuckerberg with internal company communications and emails from platform users spanning back to the infancy of Facebook in 2008 that discuss "problematic" and addictive use of social media. Zuckerberg took issue with the word "addictive."

Zuckerberg went on to concede that he initially set goals for employees to increase the amount of time teenagers spent on its platform amid efforts to expand business revenue and the number of platform users.

The deposition also delved into Zuckerberg's decision lift a temporary Instagram ban on the use of cosmetic filters that changed people's appearance in a way that seemed to promote plastic surgery.

The deposition was recorded last year and shown on Wednesday during the fourth week of the civil trial against Meta, which also oversees WhatsApp. *—PTI*

Meta smart glasses face backlash over privacy

CALIFORNIA, 5 MARCH

Meta Ray-Ban smart glasses have faced mounting backlash since their announcement, with technological failures and privacy violations, said sources.

According to the source, the glasses, created by Mark Zuckerberg's Meta Platforms in collaboration with Ray-Ban, merge Meta's AI recording technology with the glasses brand's iconic Wayfarer and Aviator frames. They have drawn criticism following a rise in influencers secretly recording and harassing unsuspecting strangers.

Offshore workers in Kenya were asked to review disturbing videos — nudity, sexual content and personal data—

captured by smart glasses, often without people's knowledge, to train AI models, an investigation by Svenska Dagbladet and Göteborgs-Posten found.

The device has also prompted broader concerns about personal consent and a fast-growing web of surveillance and facial recognition, an area in which Meta has continuously come under fire.

Even the launch was marred by live glitches. *—Agencies*

India enter final with a 7-run win over England

Varun delivers most expensive spell by an Indian in T20 WC

MUMBAI, 5 MARCH

Defending champions India defeated England by seven runs in the second semifinal to storm into the summit clash of the T20 World Cup here on Thursday.

India will play New Zealand in the final on Sunday. Sent in to bat, opener Sanju Samson blasted seven sixes and eight fours on way to a 42-ball 89 as India posted a challenging 253.

Shivam Dube (43), Ishan Kishan (39), Hardik Pandya (27), and Tilak Varma (21) also chipped in with brisk knocks.

Chasing a massive target of 254, Jacob Bethell's sensational 105 off 48 balls went in vain as England managed 246 for seven in 20 overs.

For England, Will Jacks (2/40) and Adil Rashid (2/41) claimed two wickets each. Arshdeep Singh (1/51), Axar Patel (1/35), and Varun Chakravarthy (1/64) also claimed one wicket each for India. Varun Chakaravarthy delivered the most expensive spell by an Indian in the T20 World Cups during the semifinal against England at the Wankhede on Thursday.

Varun conceded 64 runs from his four overs, taking just a solitary wicket against England to record his worst returns in a T20I game.

Brief scores:

India: 253 for seven in 20 overs (Sanju Samson 89, Shivam Dube 43, Ishan Kishan 39; Will Jacks 2/40, Adil Rashid 2/41).

England: 246 for 7 in 20 overs (Jacob Bethell 105; Jasprit Bumrah 1/33, Hardik Pandya 2/38). —*PTI*

NZ took 'bull by horns' to stop SA juggernaut: Allen

The recipe to halt the South African juggernaut was simple win the toss and "take the bull by the horns", said explosive New Zealand opener Finn Allen after powering the Kiwis into the T20 World Cup final with the fastest ever hundred of the tournament.South Africa had entered the semifinal as the form side of the tournament, being the only unbeaten team in the competition with seven successive wins. The Proteas had even defeated New Zealand in the group stage and also toppled tournament hosts and favourites India in the Super Eights. But New Zealand were at their ruthless best as they knocked out the last edition's runners-up from the semifinal with a nine-wicket win that came with 43 balls to spare at Eden Gardens here on Wednesday. "We just hoped (skipper Mitchell) Santner would win the toss to start and he did that, so that was the first part done, and from then onwards it was just take the bull by the horns... Take the game on and not shy away from any challenge," Allen, who slammed a 33-ball unbeaten 100, said in the post-match media interaction.Put in, South Africa failed to get going in the powerplay with off-spin all-rounder Cole McConchie taking the wickets of Quinton de Kock and Ryan Rickelton

PINK BALL GAME

India Women bank on recent Test form to upstage Australia

PERTH, 5 MARCH

Hammered in the ODIs, the Indian women's cricket team would expect the senior players to step up with inspiring performances when it faces Australia in a day-night Test for the first time in nearly five years, starting here on Friday.

India would be brimming with confidence, having remained unbeaten in their last five Tests. The Harmanpreet Kaur-led side won three consecutive Tests between December 2023 and July 2024, defeating England, Australia and South Africa respectively, but all those wins came on home soil.

India's last two overseas Tests ended in draws against England and Australia in 2021. The game against Australia in September-October of that year was a day-nighter that the visitors drew. A major highlight of that match was Smriti Mandhana, who scored the second of her two Test hundreds at that time.

The pink ball Test will conclude the multi-format series between the two rivals. India won the T20Is before being blanked in the ODIs, giving Australia an 8-4 lead in the points tally.

While two points each were on offer for T20 and ODI wins, the winner of the Test will get four points for an outright win. Australia would walk away with the overall honours if they are able to draw the match, but for India, a win would be needed to sign off level in the final standings.

While the onus would be on the likes of seniors Harmanpreet, her deputy Smriti Mandhana, Shafali Varma, Jemimah Rodrigues and Deepti Sharma to share the responsibility in the batting department, focus would also be on stylish right-hander Pratika Rawal, who is expected to make her Test debut on Friday.

Rawal is one of the seven uncapped India players named for the day-night Test at the WACA Ground.

The Indian squad is a mix of youth and experience with seven uncapped players in the Test line-up, including 20-year-old left-arm spinner Vaishnavi Sharma, Kranti Gaud, Sayali Satghare, and Kashvee Gautam, to name a few.

Both Kranti Gaud and Amanjot Kaur were a part of India's World Cup-winning ODI team and could make their Test debuts on Friday.

But the visitors will miss the services of experienced medium pacer Renuka Singh, who has been rested as part of her workload management. In her place, young, quick Kashvee Gautam has been included.

Australia, on the other hand, will look to give a grand farewell to their captain, Alyssa Healy, who will be playing her 299th and final international match.

Australia too have included a few uncapped players in Rachel Trenaman and Maitlan Brown in their squad following the quad injuries to Kim Garth and Ellyse Perry, and the back problem of Sophie Molineux.Match starts at 10:50am IST. —*PTI*

Sri Lanka to revamp SLC after poor T20WC show

COLOMBO, 5 MARCH

Sri Lanka's dismal performance in the T20 World Cup might trigger an overhaul of the country's cricket board, with Sports Minister Sunil Kumara Gamage saying on Thursday that an interim committee to "rebuild" the game is under consideration. Sri Lanka were knocked out of the tournament after losing all their Super Eight games. "Discussions are underway with the ICC (International Cricket Council) to hand over the administration of SLC (Sri Lanka Cricket) to an interim committee to rebuild the sport," Gamage told reporters. Current SLC chairman Shammi Silva's tenure is till May 2027. Before their Super Eight crash, Sri Lanka had lost to lower-ranked Zimbabwe in the preliminary round.—*PTI*

First batch of Zimbabwe players leave India

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Stranded here due to the closure of Gulf airspace, a batch of Zimbabwe's cricketers left for home following the end of their T20 World Cup campaign after the ICC reworked their travel arrangements to avoid the region immersed in conflict right now. Zimbabwe, which had a memorable T20 World Cup, beating Australia and Sri Lanka to make it to the Super Eights, couldn't progress beyond that and was eliminated last week. They were scheduled to leave on March 2 but were stuck in Delhi owing to the closure of airspace in the Gulf region following the US and Israeli strikes on Iran. The first batch of players finally left for home on Wednesday in alternate flights.—*PTI*

Top Indian shooters to compete in Selection Trials 3

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

The country's top shooters will vie for national squad spots for international competitions in the second half of the year at the National Selection Trials 3 (Group A) to be held at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range here from Friday.

Almost all of India's leading shooters will compete across 10 events, including the eight Olympic disciplines, along with the rifle prone competitions for men and women, in the trials that will run till Tuesday.

Rifle and pistol Selection Trials 3 and 4 for Group B athletes will also begin on Friday at the MP State Shooting Academy in Bhopal and will run till March 22.

Following the trials, selected national squad athletes will attend a coaching camp in New Delhi from March 10-21, the National Rifle Association of India stated.

The national camp for shotgun shooters also started on Thursday in New Delhi, with the skeet shooters reporting first. The trap shooters will report for the national camp on 8 March.

The national camp will be followed by the pre-event camp prior to the ISSF World Cup Shotgun, the first World Cup of the calendar year, which will be held in Tangier, Morocco, from 21 March-3 April.

The Indian teams for the first two Rifle/Pistol (Granada and Munich) and Shotgun (Tangier and Almaty) ISSF World Cup stages of the year have already been announced.

The new Olympic cycle leading up to the 2028 Los Angeles Games begins this year, with the first quota places set to be decided at the ISSF World Championship in Doha in October-November.

The season will also feature the Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026. —*PTI*

ARJUN TENDULKAR TIES THE KNOT

Arjun & Saaniya Chandhok are now married

MUMBAI, 5 MARCH

Star all-rounder Arjun Tendulkar on Thursday tied the knot with entrepreneur Saaniya Chandhok in an intimate ceremony in Mumbai, a video of which has surfaced on social media and has instantly gone viral. Arjun and Saaniya got engaged in August.

The former, who was traded from the Mumbai Indians to the Lucknow Super Giants in the Indian Premier League, is a regular feature on the Indian domestic circuit.

At the wedding, Arjun's father and batting legend Sachin Tendulkar looked like a happy dad, as he showered flowers on the duo with a broad smile on his face.

The wedding was attended by the crème de la crème of sports, cinema, and politics. Everyone from Amitabh Bachchan, Shah Rukh Khan, Aamir Khan, to Aishwarya Rai, Asha Bhosle, and more attended the wedding and blessed the couple. —*PTI*

Indian youth team departs for World Boxing Futures Cup

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

The Indian youth boxing team departed on Thursday for the World Boxing Futures Cup, scheduled to be held in Bangkok, Thailand, from 8 to 15 March.

The Indian team will compete in the Youth Olympic weight categories, making the tournament an important step in the pathway towards qualification and preparation for the Youth Olympic Games.

The Futures Cup serves as a key developmental event in the global boxing calendar, providing young athletes with valuable international competition experience. —*PTI*

MALAYSIA LOSES APPEAL AGAINST FIFA

LAUSANNE, 5 MARCH

The Malaysian Football Association lost its appeal on Thursday against a FIFA ruling that it cheated by using false documents to naturalize foreign-born players for the men's national team.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport said its judges confirmed a 350,000 Swiss francs ($450,000) fine for the FA and one-year bans for the seven players "given their complicit responsibility in this fraud."

The players were given Malaysian passports and selected for the team's 4-0 win over Vietnam last June in a qualifying game for the 2027 Asian Cup. That win should be overturned.

"The CAS panel found that the infraction of falsifying eligibility documents was established and that the 12-month ban from playing matches was a reasonable and proportionate sanction for the players," the court said. —*PTI*

Lakshya enters quarterfinals of All England C'ships

BIRMINGHAM, 5 MARCH

A relentless Lakshya Sen produced a gritty performance to beat Hong Kong's Ng Ka Long Angus and storm into the men's singles quarterfinals of the All England Open Badminton Championships here on Thursday.

World No. 12 Lakshya, a finalist at the 2022 edition, looked razor sharp as he fought through intense rallies and physical exchanges to outlast Ng Ka Long, a former world top 10 player, 21-19, 21-23, 21-10 in a pulsating round-of-16 contest."It was a very solid game, I think both the sets and also credit to him, he made a solid comeback in the second. I think I just didn't play freely towards the end of the second set and gave too many easy shots for him to kill," Lakshya said." But yeah, I think I was prepared again in the third set to just go all out, and happy with the way I played in the third."Tactically, I was playing the right game both sets, and yeah, it's just the last few points I didn't stick to the plan, just gave too many easy errors.

But again, it was important to just switch off, forget the second set, forget the first set, and just play the third set with the same game plan, which was working."Lakshya, a 2021 World Championships bronze medallist, will face either China's sixth seed Li Shi Feng or Ireland's Nhat Nguyen next."I'm feeling pretty good on court, especially the last two matches, and yeah, now it's time to again recover, another tough match tomorrow, so just have 24 hours and then just go all out," he added. Lakshya came into the match after losing all three encounters against his opponent and fell behind initially in the opening game. —*PTI*

PREMIER LEAGUE

Arsenal stretch lead at top as City falter

LONDON, 5 MARCH

Arsenal beat Brighton 1-0 -*PTI*

Premier League leaders Arsenal stretched their lead over Manchester City to seven points on Wednesday night with a nervy win at Brighton, while Pep Guardiola's men were held to a costly 2-2 draw by Nottingham Forest. The Gunners have long been favourites to win their first English league crown since 2004, but Pep Guardiola's men have loomed large in their rear-view mirror. On a busy night of action, Arsenal drew first blood in the battle for the English title as Bukayo Saka celebrated his 300th Arsenal appearance with a goal in the ninth minute at Brighton's Amex Stadium.

The Englishman received the ball on the right before cutting in and hitting a shot from the edge of the penalty area, which took a deflection off Carlos Baleba before squirming through the legs of goalkeeper Bart Verbruggen.

The home side dominated possession and had more shots, but Arsenal kept them at bay, digging deep to see out a nerve-jangling 1-0 win.

"This was a really difficult one after everything we've been through in the last few weeks," Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta told TNT Sports.

"Every game in the Premier League offers you different things. Big credit to the boys because the effort they put in is astronomical."

Second-placed City, who have a game in hand, appeared to be on course to stay within five points of top spot. —*PTI*

Ledecky defeats McIntosh in 800 freestyle

BERLIN, 5 MARCH

Leon Marchand completed an impressive double at the Westmont Pro Swim on Wednesday, winning the 200m backstroke and 200m breaststroke as Katie Ledecky topped Summer McIntosh in the 800m freestyle.

French Olympic star Marchand, now training with former Michael Phelps mentor Bob Bowman in Texas, launched his week with a victory in the 200m backstroke in 1min 57.56sec with Canadian Blake Tierney second in 1:58.61.

He returned to win the 200m breaststroke, one of his four gold medal events at the 2024 Paris Olympics, in 2:10.06 with Josh Matheny second in 2:10.71 and Jack Kelly, Marchand's training partner in Texas, third in 2:10.96 after leading much of the way.

The meet in suburban Chicago opened with a bang as America's nine-time Olympic gold med- allist Ledecky beat McIntosh in the 800m free in a battle of the fastest two performers in the history